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ABSTRACT

The 24 essays in this collection explore the ways in which young people are represented in the media in Australia. Australia's media are full of bad news about young people as perpetrators or victims of crime. The first six chapters explore a range of theoretical issues that connect media reports of young people with processes of governance in Australia. The next seven chapters examine media reports of particular events involving young people and consider media responses to those incidents. The eight chapters that follow identify some of the inclusionary/exclusionary strategies built into media accounts of particular groups of young people. The final three chapters deal with films about youth. The main theme that emerges from these disparate accounts is not that the media engage in selective interpretation, distortion, and exaggeration, but that particular forms of language and imagery combine to represent youth semiotically as a problem social category. Reports about problems among the young serve to reinforce preconceived ideas about this population and to add weight to increased calls for state intervention and social control. (Contains 6 figures, 4 tables, and 329 references.) (SLD)

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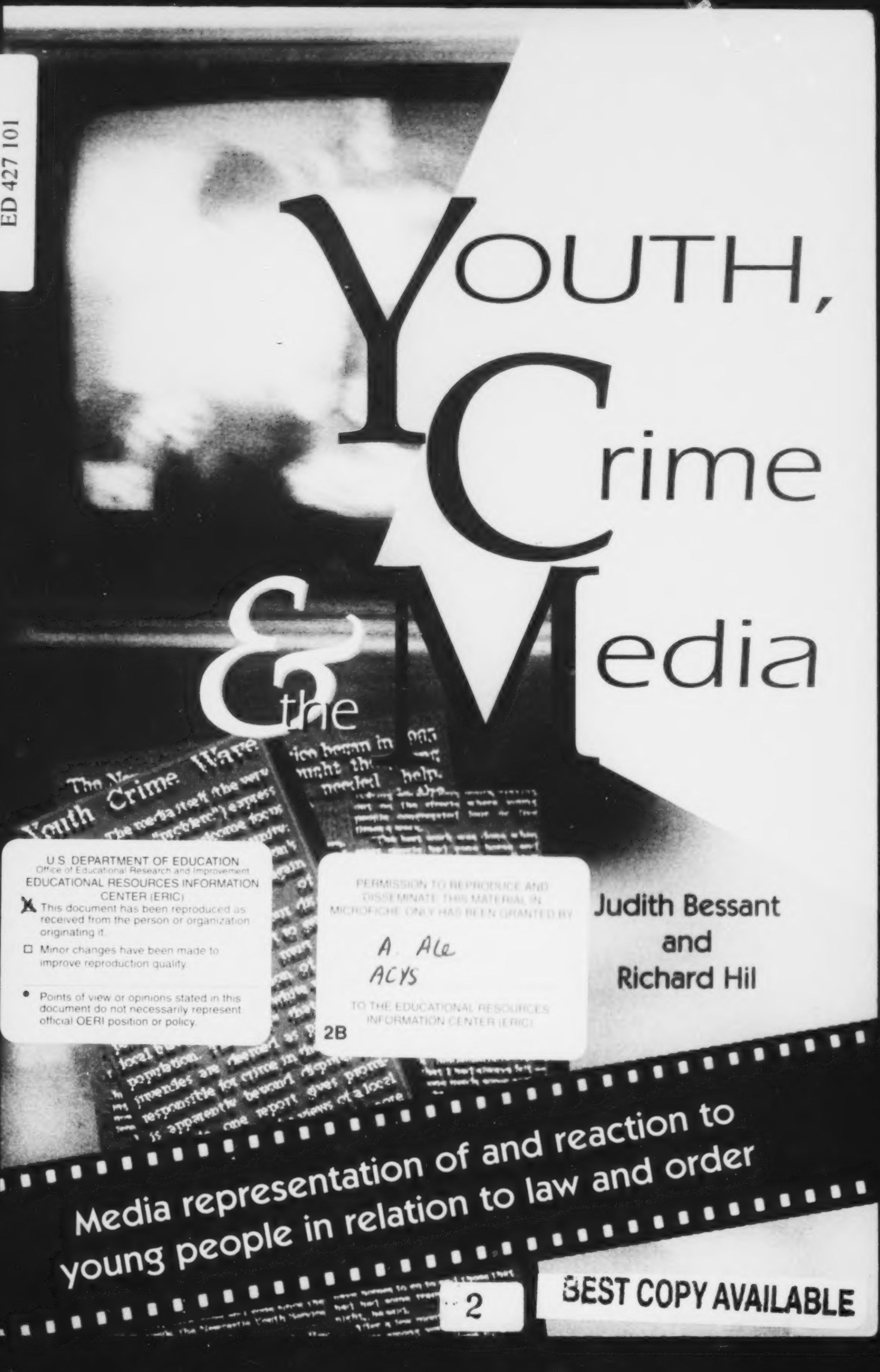

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Judith Bessant
and
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Media representation of and reaction to young people in relation to law and order

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Edited by
Judith Bessant
and
Richard Hil

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National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies

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Introduction

PACKAGED AS "bad news", crime is the staple diet of the electronic and print media. As media critic Stuart Littlemore observed (1996, p.172), crime is easy to report because it fits in neatly with tried and tested formulas. Journalists are able to draw on a rich seam of source material, usually provided by "official sources" such as the police, government bureaus or criminological "experts". The resulting material provides the raw text for the dramatic and morally charged representation of the latest outbreaks of deviancy. It is during the process of reporting that journalists position themselves as campaigners in pursuit of moral consensus, social stability and a sense of "community" (Young 1996). News, as the fictitious television journalists of *Frontline* would argue, is reported in a "balanced", "unbiased" and "objective" way. What in fact is reported by the spin doctors of broadcasting is a highly truncated body of information, taken for granted "knowledge" and superficial analysis (Windschuttle 1988, pp.293–94). Detailed coverage and "in-depth analysis" is transferred to specialist time slots. "The news" is reserved for specific and fleeting representations of the day's events. Such news is invariably conveyed as the only accurate depiction of events in the social world (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1991, pp.342–50).

Despite the claims to impartiality and objectivity and the fact that what passes for news is often little more than opinion, media accounts are mythologised as sober reflections on the major events occurring domestically and throughout the world (Cohen & Young 1973, pp.10–11). Such supposed self-restraint, however, conceals the fact that news is predicated upon a number of culturally specific assumptions about the prevailing social order. These assumptions extend to relationships between various social groups and to the dominant political system itself. Thus, despite the liberal myth of unrestricted "free speech" manifested in ritualised presentations of news, the media are bound ideologically by the imperatives of the dominant elites (Windschuttle 1988, p.296).

Perhaps since the inception of mass media, crime in all its shapes and sizes has attracted the continuous attention of journalists. Crime, and in particular juvenile crime, is deemed "newsworthy" precisely because of its purported presence in the social body and because it makes for dramatic appeal and "good copy". And yet, as with countless other aspects of news reportage, the stories about young people that are chosen for public consumption are highly selective, often distorted and routinely exaggerated (Chibnall 1977; Roach-Anleu 1991, pp.95–96). Murders, sexual offences, bashings, muggings, riots, gang warfare, home invasions and various forms of street crime tend to occupy disproportionate amounts of space in news reports on young people. In contrast, while the trials and tribulations of corporate magnates such as Alan Bond and Christopher Skase and the activities of city slickers such as insider traders and tax evaders make the front pages, other routine forms of corporate crime such as infringements of health and safety regulations (often causing death or serious injury) and the marketing of potentially hazardous pharmaceuticals or foodstuffs are reported less frequently. The media reserves its most vociferous reporting for the apparent "crime waves" and "social problems" generated by certain sections of the youth[1] population.

Australia's media is full of "bad" news about young people. Official inquiries and expert opinion feed media reports that young people today are more offensive, disagreeable and worse off than ever before. The media joins a chorus of concerns from official, academic and mainstream sources about a perceived threat of disorder posed by high levels of youth unemployment – a generation of teenagers "in limbo". This sits alongside youth-as-victim scenarios and "anthems for discarded youth", "hidden drug epidemics" and tabloid accounts of "youth gang" life (see Hugh Mackay, *Weekend Australian*, 21–22 September 1996).

Alarm bells regularly warn of the impending dangers posed by young people. Juvenile crime rates, increasing drug problems, rampant violence and widespread depressive illness are all said to be signs of Western culture's deepening crisis (Eckersley 1993; *Herald Sun*, 6 April 1996; Eckersley, *Australian*, 7–8 September 1996; Yallop, *Australian*, 17–18 August 1996). Contemporary young people are pictured as politically apathetic, extremely negative and pessimistic, full of despair, interested only in themselves, in soapies and fashion rather than "world affairs" (*Age*, 29 November 1993; *Courier Mail*, 30 November 1993; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 1993; Eckersley, *Australian*, 7–8 September 1996). Young people today allegedly have "no passion for issues, or for life itself ... As a group they are very self-centred" (*Australian*, 3 December 1993). Moreover, certain "types" of young people are said to deal with their "plight" through violence and crime.

Repeatedly we hear warnings in the media of gang-related violence and crime, high-speed car chases in stolen vehicles, or the "emergence of a North American style juvenile underclass" (for a critical analysis of such media reports see Sercombe 1995). If such reports are accurate, then we are now witnessing major increases in hard-core crime and an epidemic of recidivist juvenile offenders. We hear how knives, guns, cutthroat razors, baseball bats, hockey sticks, crossbows and knuckle dusters are the preferred weapons of inter-gang battles. Press treatments highlight what is identified as "gang violence" with stories of weapons-carrying "youth" becoming a recurring news item. Inserted in media reports are expert speculations about "the causes" of deviancy. Typically this is followed by corrective speculation, programs and policies intended to rectify these social problems. Occasionally, an expatriate media owner may take time out to warn of the danger of "unemployed youth" becoming "totally destructive".

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[1] For the purpose of this book we have adopted a broad definition of "youth" as ranging from 13 to 25 years of age. To some extent any such thresholds are arbitrary or based in specific legal definitions or conventional understandings of what is meant by "youth". There are also cross-cultural variations in this respect. We employ the term generically to cover the chronological phases usually associated with children, juveniles and young people. The thresholds are not given and we acknowledge that in some quarters youth may now extend to those aged 30!

Such negative and pessimistic representations influence party politics and government policy, and tend to carry considerable weight, especially in the lead-up to elections. In Victoria, the *Crimes Amendment Act 1994* extended police powers over young people, while legislation introduced under a state Labor government in Western Australia endorsed indeterminate jail terms for certain young offenders. Local government youth curfews and vigilante practices that infringe the rights of young people to free association (as proposed in NSW) are also responses to the "threat" of "unrestrained youth". In Queensland, the *Southbank Corporation Amendment Act 1996* gives security guards the authority to banish young people from public riverside parkland in Brisbane. During the 1995 New South Wales state election campaign, the then Premier John Fahey and Opposition Leader Bob Carr played heavily on popular fears that juvenile crime, teen colour gangs and ethnic gangs were out of control. In NSW, public suspicion of young people, generated in part by negative media reports, has seen young people's right to assembly threatened by the proposed use of police to disperse young people (Street Safety Bill 1996).

During the 1995 Queensland state election, it was reported that incidences of violence and disruption by students had led to the banning of 800 students from schools. Added to this was an assortment of other perceived youth problems (see *Weekend Bulletin*, 24 June 1995; *Courier Mail*, 1 July 1995). The then Queensland Premier, Wayne Goss, promised to get tough on schoolyard violence and to install electronic surveillance systems in public places, youth curfews on school properties and a $13 million school discipline policy. Endeavouring to be seen to be dealing with the "youth problem", the NSW state Labor Party ear-marked $50 million for gymnasiums (*Courier Mail*, 13 July 1995). Marching to the same drum, Queensland Opposition leader Borbidge promised to increase funding for youth education specialist services (*Sunday Mail*, 2 July 1995). That such proposals held sway in political circles is attributable, in part, to a pattern of reports on juveniles in Queensland and elsewhere that depicted young people, at best, as a problem (to be controlled and regulated) and, at worst, as a direct threat to social order (see chapters by Hil and McMahon in this volume for recent examples of such press coverage).

Media representation of young people as a problem is not new. Indeed, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries persistent moral outrage was expressed by newspapers over the actions of "hooligans". The term became a by-word for those desperate young people who constituted part of the so-called "dangerous classes" (Pearson 1983). The editorials and news items of the day fuelled public anxieties over the imminent collapse of law and order. The establishment was mobilised in repeated and often unsuccessful attempts to manage the crime problem (Tobias 1967). Similarly, in the 1790s concerns were voiced in Australia about convict children, depicted as "impertinent and wicked little felons" (Dow & Factor 1991). Over the decades such apprehensions about "neglected and criminal children" have resurfaced repeatedly.

The problem of street urchins and larrikins saw recurrent episodes of moral panic throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Accounts of young people "infesting" the streets, causing bother to "rate-paying shop keepers and innocent pedestrians" became an integral part of nineteenth century news (*Richmond Guardian*, 28 January 1888). The *Australian Women's Weekly* was one of the many popular magazines that continued this imagery in the 1950s. Drawing on medical metaphors, the *Australian Women's Weekly* warned that "bad behaviour is as contagious as measles". Furthermore, the wise mother was one who watched for signs of it, "just as anxiously as she watches for signs of a measles rash" (*Australian*

Women's Weekly, 21 September 1955). Historically, the discovery of a "youth problem" has been met with the standard solution – to seek increases in police powers (*Richmond Guardian*, 28 January 1888; *Age*, 14 January 1894; Murray 1994; Finnane 1994 pp.7–26).

More recent moral panics over juvenile crime have erupted at regular intervals. It is during such times that media accounts of social events involving juveniles serve to heighten public concerns over this section of the population. The persistence of images of youth as the agents of disorder can be better understood as reactions to larger processes of social and historical transformation. This is evidenced in the ways such stories rely on historical idiom and metaphors of demise, of decaying civilising forces and moral decay. Images of youthful disorder, lawlessness and juvenile crime are represented as new and serious problems of the modern state that require various disciplinary responses (Pearson 1983).

Much of the contemporary distress about young people is linked to a popular uncertainty about the future. The association of youth with grim forebodings and widespread uncertainty, is similar to the kinds of concerns that have struck fear into the hearts of many over the last few hundred years. Such fears of the future are coupled with culturally pessimistic diagnoses of the moral and behavioural degeneration of youth which become indisputable signs of the sins and transgressions of modernity (Fornas 1995).

The current pessimistic portrayals of young people tend to constitute this social category as bad, troubling and troublesome. However, these discursive representations often reveal more about the apprehensions, fantasies and anxieties of those doing the reporting and their perceptions of their audience, than they do about the young people they are portraying.

Media portrayals of problematic youth are fundamental to the ways we come to see and know certain young people individually and collectively. Indeed, media accounts do more than influence the policy-making processes of modern states. Many writers now recognise the role played by such narratives in constituting a sense of self, stability, social and (even) a universal order (Richardson 1990).

Both ourselves and our interactions in the social world are in part constituted through the stories we produce and reproduce. Under conditions of modernity much of the media's power lies in its technical capability to tell and amplify stories to mass audiences who have come to rely on it as their source of news about the world and the place of young people within it. It is in this sense, irrespective of any "reality" that the reports might have, that through the telling and retelling of stories about escalating juvenile crime, violence as youthful disorder becomes a central concern for communities and governments.

To explore the nature of news reporting in relation to young people in Australia we have gathered a range of contributions from researchers, practitioners and journalists. The book is also interspersed with comments from indigenous and non-indigenous young people from Townsville and Melbourne on the ways in which they believe they are represented by the media. What emerges from these accounts is a picture of news reports on young people that systematically exaggerates, distorts and stereotypes young people as a problem and therefore as a threat to social order.

The main theme to emerge from these disparate accounts is not simply that the media engages in processes of selective interpretation, distortion and exaggeration – such processes are axiomatic of media reporting – but rather that particular forms of language and imagery combine to represent youth semiotically as a problem social category. The parameters of such reportage are defined through the conventional wisdoms and politicised understandings of the position of young people in Western liberal states. Reports of juvenile crime, student protest and general disaffection among the young serve to reinforce preconceived ideas about this population and add weight to calls for increased state intervention and social control.

Reporting Law and Order is divided into three parts. The first section explores a range of theoretical issues that connect media reports of young people with processes of governance. As Brian Simpson explains in his essay on moral panics, news reports on young people need to be understood in the context of the institutionalised ways in which youth are defined as a problem. Such representation helps to sustain discourses of deficit and disorder that often accompany news on young people. They also ensure that young people, as a danger to social consensus, receive continued high levels of surveillance and regulation.

Belinda Carpenter, Gavin Kendell and Gordon Tait consider the public debate on the perceived relationship between the frequency of violence on television and film and the extent of violence in the community. They ask some penetrating questions about why the extension of responsibilities of the parent is seen by many to be the most appropriate way of dealing with violence. Judith Bessant's chapter builds on the specific ways in which the media construct social categories of young people as a threat to social order and the implications of this in terms of legitimating certain disciplinary practices. Bessant looks at press images of the juvenile underclass and considers how those accounts rely on certain sociological traditions.

Howard Sercombe's chapter arises from a study of newspaper reporting of young people, and the implications of the constructions of youth presented in the media for youth policy and public perception. Among the variables studied in the production process were the *sources* of newspaper stories. The study finds that two sources overwhelmingly predominate in youth news: the police and the courts. The reasons for this lie in the economics of news production, where newspaper staff must, on any day, fill the news requirement for production of the newspaper that day. Because the production of youth crime via the courts and policy statements is regular and routine, it is cheap and easy to collect. Crime news, especially juvenile crime news, also works in terms of news values. And paradoxically, the major restriction on the reporting of youth crime (that the offender not be identified) removes a number of other restrictions on reporting to do with *sub judice* and potential contempt of court, and facilitates the unfettered reporting of juvenile crime. The result of this overexposure of juvenile offending within the media is an awareness of the issue within the audience out of proportion to the risk. This, as Sercombe observes, has specific implications in social policy terms.

Susanne Davies' chapter analyses visual representations of youth, evil and innocence in the media. She explores the status and use of photography as a privileged means of portraying young people in relation to the development of positivist knowledge and practice. Michael Wearing reviews some recent media and criminological accounts of a perceived link between youth unemployment and juvenile crime in Australia, giving particular attention to the use of "statistical knowledge".

Part two of the book examines media reports of particular events involving young people and considers media responses to those incidents. Tony McMahon reports on juvenile crime in Townsville and Richard Hil on a media-induced moral panic over black juvenile crime in a north Queensland sugarcane town. John Hillel provides detailed analysis of television news reports about a young person who died while train "surfing". He considers how choices are made in the selection of images and commentary, and argues that those choices support entrenched popular perceptions of young people as potentially delinquent and youth cultures as criminally inclined.

Phil Crane critically analyses a Queensland report on media images of young people. He describes the findings, observes the absence of young people's voices from the news and writes about the sociopolitical implications of the failure to include young people's views.

Terry Laidler's contribution comes from a speech he recently gave at a Youth Affairs Council of Victoria meeting. He outlines, from a journalist's perspective, the ways in which the imperative of newsworthiness shapes the construction of news about young people.

Peter Rendell considers the frequency of juvenile crime reports in the media and compares that with official figures on offending youth.

Chris Atmore provides an inclusive critique of the use of the "moral panic" concept in relation to cases of child abuse. The "simple polarisations" between full-scale panics over child abuse and the "normalising" of sexual abuse within patriarchal contexts needs to be contested through more careful analysis.

The third section of the book identifies some of the inclusionary/exclusionary strategies built into media accounts of particular young people, such as "promiscuous" girls, certain minority ethnic groups, disabled young people, young Nazis, children who kill and young people who protest.

Kerry Carrington begins by considering the way cases of sexual violence against young women and men are reported by the media. Ruth Webber and Ulla Svensson examine the ways in which boys who kill are portrayed in the press. Genée Marks and Sandy Cook document the way in which media preoccupation with able young bodies speak so disparagingly about young people with disabilities as deviants. They refer to the absence of media stories of violence against young people with disabilities and the preference for stories about "disabled youth" as perpetrators of violence.

David Greason writes on media images of young Australian Nazis. Doug Lorman analyses media accounts of juvenile car theft in Western Australia, and Soo-Lin Quek and Ashley Carruthers look at media representations of Vietnamese young people. Quek gives particular attention to the privileged information and authority sources used by journalists in the reporting of "ethnic" crime and deviance, making a similar finding to Crane that the views of young people are ignored, while Carruthers believes we are seeing the "mainstreaming" of multiculturalism in Australia's mass culture. Rob Watts provides a chapter on media representations of student protesters in the 1960s and the ways in which they were systematically cast as disaffected and feckless agitators – a counterpoint to the respectable and conservative law-abiding majority.

Finally, we conclude with a short section on the livliest medium – cinema. Karl Quinn looks at the controversial film *Romper Stomper*, John Murray writers about the New Zealand fact-based film *Heavenly Creatures*, and Susan Hopkins analyses Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* as a cultural product of Generation X.

Judith Bessant & Richard Hil

Theorising the media and the regulation of youth

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Brian Simpson

Youth crime, the media and moral panic

THE OFFICIAL response to youth crime in recent years has been to abandon many aspects of the welfare approach with its emphasis on rehabilitation and to adopt strategies which are far more punitive in effect. Critics of this trend in juvenile justice often invoke the concept of "moral panic" to explain such shifts in policy. At the centre of this critique is the contention that young people are scapegoated for society's ills and that many adults avoid addressing the structural causes of young people's behaviour by accepting the messages contained in the moral panics created around young people. These panics usually cast young offenders as "evil" or "wicked" and suggest that youth crime has reached "epidemic" proportions justifying harsh responses. While there may be a simple attraction in such solutions, a theory of moral panics, discussed here, shows how the imagery upon which these responses are based obscures the complexity of youth crime.

This chapter discusses the meaning of moral panic, the role of the media in creating such panics, the applicability of a theory of moral panics in contemporary Australia and the social consequences of moral panics. In doing so, it is hoped that it provides a context within which further discussions of youth crime, the media and moral panic can take place.

The meaning of moral panic

The concept of the moral panic is based on the notion that societal outrage or concern can be directed against certain groups in society through the representation of negative images of them in the media. Such representations, it is argued, will often lead to a public outcry which can then be used to justify harsh and oppressive treatment of those around whom the panic is created. Cohen explained this process and popularised the term "moral panic" in the 1970s when he examined the phenomenon of mods and rockers in Britain (Cohen 1972). He was concerned to show not just how such groups were demonised but also how the processes of moral indignation amplified their deviant behaviour by causing them to react against the harsh treatment which they received from those in authority as a consequence of this moral outrage. This amplification occurred when young people retaliated against their treatment by police and others who dealt with them in a heavy-handed manner. Instead of identifying the initial police approach as part of the cause of the behaviour, the response of the young people was taken to be confirmation that they were indeed "wicked", reassuring law enforcement

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agencies that the targeted group were a social problem to be dealt with (Cohen 1972).

This lack of insight on the part of those who dealt with the young people relates to an important part of the theory, as Cohen stressed, that the process of creating a moral panic seeks not to understand and address the reasons for the behaviour but simply to suppress it (p.204). A moral panic diverts the main object of concern away from the behaviour of the group towards the status of its members. Thus, in addition to the perceived inappropriate behaviour, a moral panic requires the presentation of that behaviour as essentially "evil" without careful analysis of its origins, causes or context. This in turn fuels a popular reaction that leads to the "demonisation" of the group.

A moral panic thus shifts the focus away from the actions of a group and towards a concern with their character and the way in which that presents a threat to the moral fabric of society. For example, in the case of the mods and rockers studied by Cohen, it was not just their behaviour which caused concern but also that the young people challenged social norms by adhering to a different value system to those who disapproved of them.

> *In the case of the Mods and Rockers, the moral panic was sustained both by the direct threats (in the narrow sense) to persons, property, commercial interests and the gross interests threatened by the violation of certain approved styles of life ... prematurely affluent, aggressive, permissive and challenging the ethics of sobriety and hard work ...* (Cohen 1972, p.198).

Thus, while the creation of a moral panic may depend upon the characterisation of certain behaviour as inappropriate, this will not be as important as the fact that the actions challenge the usual pattern of behaviour. Moral panics have consequently been constructed around drug use, homosexuality and other acts which might be described as proceeding from a different view from that of the majority (Greenwood & Young 1980, p.149). An obvious consequence of this process is the remarkable capacity to lose perspective among those who panic about the behaviour. Their reaction to the conduct of the people involved will be based on the perception of others as "demons" as much as it is a reaction to the behaviour itself. In this context it is easy to stimulate appropriate responses and maintain an air of balance while proposing quite draconian practices and procedures to remove the problem.

While any group may be at the centre of such a panic, it is the powerless and marginalised who are usually targeted. It is often their mere presence which is regarded as a threat to the social order. In addition they have the least ability to resist attempts to cast them in the role of folk devil. Young people, as a result, often find their behaviour portrayed in the media as evidence of their wicked ways – the drug use, alcohol consumption, graffiti, music, school behaviour, sexual activity, and even roller-blading of young people have been the subject of negative media imagery at various times. Such images depict the behaviour as wrong and typical of youth without direction or discipline. The behaviour is cast as illegitimate and the persons who engage in it are considered irrational and to be feared even though older people may do similar things without the same concerns being expressed (Murray 1996, p.80).

The relevance of moral panics in contemporary Australia

Writing in the 1970s, Cohen was in no doubt that a theory of moral panics would retain its relevance in the future:

> *[m]ore moral panics will be generated and other, as yet nameless, folk devils will be created. This is not because such developments have an inexorable logic, but because our society as presently*

> *structured will continue to generate problems for some of its members – like working-class adolescents – and then condemn whatever solutions these groups find* (Cohen 1972, p.204).

The problems which Cohen referred to have become more acute today. The contraction of government welfare born of fiscal constraints, the effects of industrial and labour market reform and the rise of new technologies have left many people – particularly young people – confused and uncertain about their futures. On the other hand, the very same changes in society have led to many people – particularly older people – becoming financially prosperous. Increasing inequalities between rich and poor and the social effects of economic restructuring are the ideal conditions within which social alienation can occur, leading to attempts by marginalised people to respond to it in ways which are meaningful for them. As White has remarked:

> *A general deterioration in the lifestyle and life chances of working-class young people has created the conditions for greater social unrest and, at a personal level, identity crisis. The working through of contradictions generated by economic and social forces at the personal level is bound to produce a variety of responses in young people* (White 1990, p.109).

It is true that some of the responses by young people often take the form of acts which are considered inappropriate or illegal and so provide the basis for the creation of moral panics. But as remarked above, the creation of a moral panic is more about disguising the manner in which such acts result from social and economic forces than articulating a considered reaction to the behaviour.

A theory of moral panics thus connects shifts in macro-economic policy with what happens on the streets of towns and cities. Reductions in public expenditure in recent years have fallen hardest on those who need state support to enhance their life chances. This marginalisation of some sections of society has also been accompanied by an ideological shift which stresses individual responsibility and competition as the hallmarks of a "good" society. The values of the marketplace may now dominate our social agenda but they do so at a cost:

> *… individuals cannot learn to speak for themselves at all, much less come to an intelligent understanding of their happiness and well-being, in a world in which there are no values except those of the market. Even liberal individuals require the character-forming discipline of the family, the neighbourhood, the school, and the church, all of which (not just the family) have been weakened by the encroachments of the market. The market notoriously tends to universalize itself. It does not easily coexist with institutions that operate according to principles antithetical to itself: schools and universities, newspapers and magazines, charities, families. Sooner or later the market tends to absorb them all. It puts an almost irresistible pressure on every activity to justify itself in the only terms it recognizes: to become a business proposition* (Lasch 1995, pp.97–98).

The conflict which arises between market values and the values which exist in spite of the market provides both the *need* for moral panics and their *evidence*. Moral panics are "needed" to create social cohesion in this period of social upheaval. The "evidence" comes from the actions of those who react to that upheaval in ways which do not acknowledge the values of the market and in doing so challenge those values. A theory of moral panics must have contemporary relevance as it explains how society presently seeks to achieve social cohesion through the discrediting of those who challenge the prevailing social orthodoxy.

Of course, the creation of social cohesion "by evoking perceived threats from outsiders"

(Cox 1995, p.29) is only one means of attaining this objective. One can also create social trust through inclusion and understanding of alternative viewpoints and modes of behaviour (p.29). This is a central concern of those who use a theory of moral panics to explain what is happening in the area of youth crime. The purpose of exposing moral panics is not to pretend that no problem exists but instead to see it more clearly and to devise responses which are based on a clearer understanding of events instead of fear or hate (Cohen 1972, p.204).

The role of media reportage in the creation of moral panic

The media plays an important role on a number of different levels in the creation of moral panics. Most of the media is concerned with the creation of an audience for its advertisers so the reporting of events and incidents which will attract the most viewers or readers is of prime importance. The running of news items which are "sensational" or presented in a headline-grabbing way are often the main fare of media news and current affairs. After all, the reporting of a crisis or panic is much more likely to draw an audience than calm analysis of events. Thus, many newspapers and current affairs programs on television conduct moral crusades because this can hold an audience over a number of days (or even weeks).

But the reporting of events can also amplify the behaviour being reported and so further the creation of the moral panic. The viewers of television, for example, will include those whose behaviour is being reported, so one also has to consider the influence on those people of the images being shown (Cohen 1972, p.162). It can also lead others to imitate the behaviour and so further justify the moral outrage displayed against the persons who have been targeted for attention (p.162).

The behaviour of young people in particular appears to attract much media scrutiny in this context. It is important to recognise the differing roles the media play in the creation of moral panics affecting the young. Much of the literature on moral panics and young people focuses on the negative images of youth portrayed in the media. But the non-news media have also been attacked for creating delinquency through their fictional or imaginative depictions of inappropriate forms of behaviour – criticism with a long history, from the values espoused by comic books (Gilbert 1986) to the depiction of violence in television series and films. It is therefore important to differentiate between the role of the media in reporting on young people and the creation of moral panics on the one hand, and its role in suggesting to young people lifestyle choices which when adopted are used by others – including the media – as evidence of their anti-social leanings.

There is much evidence that the media portrays young people in an overly negative light through the emphasis it gives to the negative behaviour of young people. Cuneen and White (1995) refer to studies which identify the amount of newspaper space devoted to negative images of youth. They also remark on the manner in which young people from Aboriginal or non-English-speaking backgrounds are often targeted in such media reports (p.113). Such media reports are often criticised for creating a climate within which it is easy to single out youth for special attention through more punitive legislative responses (Gale, Naffine & Wundersitz 1993, p.142).

The media may defend their reporting of young people on the basis that they have a responsibility to report "the news". But the notion of what is considered "news" is highly problematic. This is demonstrated by a Western Australian report for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The report commented on media coverage of the involvement of Aboriginal youths in high speed car chases and the use of a nine-month-old police report which showed that "more than half the young criminals caught in high speed chases by the police are Aboriginal" (*West Australian*, 18 May 1990, in Dodson 1991, p.278).

> *The headline came at the end of a week of extraordinary media treatment of high speed car chases and juvenile delinquency, much of which was attributed to Aboriginal youth. The week saw major reports with photos and headlines daily in Perth's three main newspapers, headlines on the issue in the dailies for four consecutive days, press and electronic media travelling around in police cars, calls for tougher police measures and powers to deal with young offenders, stiffer penalties from the courts and hasty reactions from Government and opposition politicians can be properly described as police and media driven "moral panic" over juvenile delinquency* (Dodson 1991, p.279).

The report asked why the crimes "should ... assume sensational proportions at that particular time, as they have indeed at other times in the recent past, when all evidence presented by authorities suggests that they are occurring all the time?" (Dodson 1991, p.279). It cited one explanation:

> *the press can create "pseudo-disasters" which may have no discernible relation with events as they are known by outsiders. Pseudo-disasters, crime waves and panics create a reality which is organised by the structure of the newspaper office alone. Most probably, these autonomous news cycles are more conveniently constructed than any other to meet the space and timetabling demands of a newspaper organisation* (Rock 1981, p.69).

This analysis highlights the way in which certain news items gain prominence not through their intrinsic newsworthiness but because of factors quite removed from the event. Thus, in addition to the organisational needs of the media one must also consider the extent to which "visual opportunities" – particularly for television – play a part in deciding whether the story is reported and how it is reported. Clearly, the consequences of car chases – at least where a collision occurs – provide sensational images for broadcast or printing which is likely to attract an audience. Likewise acts of vandalism, graffiti and brawls involving youth can readily be captured by the lens.

One might also consider the capacity of newspaper, radio and television journalists themselves to address the subtleties of juvenile crime. There seems to be little prestige within the media for those journalists who concentrate on such issues in a serious way. Young reporters may hone their skills on such stories, but do they ever move beyond reporting in simple but sensational terms the phenomenon of youth crime in the hope of making the front page? It is worthy of note that in those parts of the media where more careful analysis of youth offending does occur much reliance is often placed on those who work in the field rather than the newspaper's own staff.

Thus panics are produced by the media not as the result of some conspiracy against young people but through institutional pressures and failures which then take on a life of their own and compound the problem. The political powerlessness of young people, combined with their propensity for engaging in behaviour which is visible and so easily sensationalised, assists the media in creating a "newsworthy" story. As Cohen wrote:

> *The manipulation of appropriate symbols – the process which sustains moral campaigns, panics and crusades – is made much easier when the object of attack is both highly visible and structurally weak* (Cohen 1972, p.198).

It is perhaps ironic that the economic forces which create the climate of alienation which young people often react to through inappropriate behaviour are the same forces which place pressure on the mass media to create an audience for their programs. The contemporary drive towards self-regulation in the media and a desire to judge success in terms of the philosophy of the market increases the likelihood of the creation of further moral panics – crusades, campaigns and panics do capture an audience. And because the reporting of such behaviour may lead to imitation, it may also guarantee a continued pool of stories to reproduce that market.

There is then a remarkable convergence of circumstances within which the media are positioned as a powerful force for the creation of moral panics. Increasing inequalities escalate the possibilities for social conflict which lead to behavioural responses deemed wrong by many people. This is occurring as the media are becoming more market driven and competitive in an era where increasing media forms (such as pay TV) and new technologies are segmenting audiences and threatening advertising revenue. The result is the need to construct and hold an audience through reporting events which capture the attention of viewers and readers. Television news programs are important in building a prime time viewing audience. Similarly, newspapers must use their front page to encourage purchase of the paper in order to provide an "audience" for the advertising inside.

Frequently, there is sufficient community concern to legitimate the moral crusades or panics which the media creates or fuels. The editor, producer or journalist can defend her or his coverage as simply reflecting that community concern. It may be true that media reporting of graffiti and other "anti-social" acts committed by young people does reflect the concerns of some people in the community, but this "community" does not consider the perpetrators of such acts as part of the community (Murray 1996, p.80). Nor do those who defend the actions of the young people escape criticism by members of "the community" for being "do-gooders" who are soft on crime. It is another aspect of the moral panic that the "others" – the demons and their supporters – are cast outside "the community" who scorn them.

The social consequences of the creation of moral panic

The process of constructing a moral panic around the activities of young people has the effect of legitimating action towards them which is harsh and repressive. In the context of a moral panic such action can even be presented as beneficial. An example of this is the recent suggestion that children and young people should be subject to curfews. While such approaches to crime control have a long history, in more recent years they have resurfaced as a response to perceived rises in juvenile offending (Simpson & Simpson 1993). But in South Australia, a Member of Parliament has supported curfews as a protection for children as much as for the rest of the community:

> *"Young children can be seen roaming the streets at all hours of the night and they are at risk", she said yesterday.*
> *"It is most concerning – they are putting themselves at risk of abduction and assault.*
> *"And a curfew sanctioned by law could reduce the opportunity for criminal activity …*
> *"A curfew may appear to be a severe message to give a 10-year-old", Mrs Kotz said.*
> *"But when they are committing the type of crimes you see in the statistics, then it is a very soft message"* ('Midnight curfew for children' *Advertiser*, 8 May 1996, p.3).

Such calls follow on from media representation of both general fears in the community about the safety of children and depictions of young people as a danger or threat to other citizens. Many of these images (and solutions) are imported from the United States where juvenile gangs may be a different problem (See 'Juvenile curfews and gang violence: Exiled on main Street' 1994, *Harvard Law Review*, vol.107). The panic which is created by the use of such images tends to obscure any consideration of the relevance of such policies for Australia.

In this example one can see what often happens when a moral panic occurs. Calls for curfews clearly ignore the rights of children to occupy public spaces. Such rights are becoming increasingly difficult to assert in a society which is privatising many public spaces. The process of privatisation often means that young people are not welcome in spaces designed to generate profits from people with money to spend (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993; White 1990; Anand 1987). The act of simply being in such spaces can easily be labelled as inappropriate and so justify moves to exclude the young. Thus curfews are an example of a broader process of exclusion which moral panics obscure and ignore (NCLS 1996, p.9).

Criticism of the media can therefore be made on the grounds of what they do not report as much as what they do. The process of privatisation is subtle and incremental but lies behind much of the alienation which young people experience in society. The media are themselves governed largely by the philosophy of private enterprise and the marketplace. Their advertisers are unlikely to be receptive to any medium which suggests that commercial interests must often yield to those with other objectives. Thus the media will continue to concentrate on the problem behaviour of young people as a manifestation of their difficulty in adjusting to society simply because it cannot accommodate other explanations of such behaviour in any meaningful and long-term way. The most pernicious social consequence of the moral panic then is the manner in which it narrows the debate about youth crime and the position of youth in society generally. A theory of moral panics must continue to expose this process. As Cohen said:

> *It is not enough to say that witches should not have been burnt or that in some other society or in another century they might not have been called witches; one has to explain why and how certain people get to the stake now* (Cohen 1972, p.204).

Unless this is done we face the prospect of living in a society where the marginalisation of youth continues to produce the devils we fear.

Gordon Tait, Gavin Kendall & Belinda Carpenter

Violence in the media

Youth, government and censorship

THE RELATIONSHIP between the frequency of violence on television and in films, and the extent of violence in the community, has resurfaced as an issue of debate. As reported in an article in *The Weekend Australian* (3–4 June 1995, p.13), US Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole criticised sections of the Hollywood establishment for "marketing evil" and for "revel(ling) in mindless violence". Blaming the media for increasing levels of violence – in particular, citing films such as *Natural Born Killers* and *True Romance*, as well as the lyrics to some rap songs – Dole was quoted as saying: "You have sold your souls, but must you debase our nation and threaten our children as well?" These comments did not go unchallenged. Oliver Stone, who directed *Natural Born Killers*, countered by stating: "It is the height of hypocrisy for Senator Dole, who wants to repeal the assault weapons ban, to blame Hollywood for the violence in our society." Similarly, former president of the Screen Actors Guild, Ed Asner, claimed that: "to Senator Dole it's okay to carry a gun but it's not okay to write a song about it."

While such calls for censorship in the United States have repeatedly come from the religious right, concerns over the relationship between depictions of violence in the media and real violence on the streets have also recently been expressed from a more unexpected quarter. President Clinton himself recently stated that he looks forward to the time when a new invention, which allows parents to censor violent or sexually explicit television programs, would become standard on all television sets. By making this comment, Clinton sought to tap perennial American concerns over "family values" and "parental responsibility", while stopping short of advocating direct legislation over the content of Hollywood movies.

These debates have not been limited to the United States. Within the Australian context, such concerns have been widely expressed on a fairly regular basis. As John Langer (1995) points out, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's (1990) report, *TV Violence in Australia*, was largely a response to the Hoddle Street and Queen Street massacres in Melbourne. More recently still, Langer points to comments by Queensland criminologist Professor Paul Wilson in 1994, who postulated a link between the rise in levels of violence in the media, and an increase in the apparently "gruesome" nature of contemporary criminal violence.

And in the wake of the Port Arthur massacre in Tasmania, the Australian Prime Minister John Howard announced a ministerial committee to consider tighter restrictions on violent films, videos and video and computer games as well as the possibility of the networks being forced to delay the screening of violent films until 9.30 pm or 10 pm. "Mr Howard told Parliament he found it difficult to believe the 'mind-numbing' violence shown in movies and games could not affect the minds of those exposed to it [and while he] 'abhorred censorship' and believed adults should be allowed to use their own judgement about material they wanted to watch ... the Tasmanian tragedy should make people, particularly parents, reflect on movies and computer games" (*Courier Mail*, 7 May 1996, p.1).

Quite clearly, such calls are based on the belief that it is the young that are at most danger from this exposure. As the leader of the Federal Opposition, Kym Beazley, argued in the same parliamentary sitting, "by the time a child has turned 18 he or she has witnessed 18,000 violent deaths" (*Australian*, 7 May 1996, p.2). Such exposure is cited as having a "profound impact" on some members of the community. Moreover, such a statement from the Prime Minister, like President Clinton's position on the same issue, perpetuates the importance of family values and parental responsibility. The importance of parental responsibility was taken further by the Premier of Western Australia, Richard Court, who advocated a "v-chip processor [in Australian television receivers] to screen out programs containing violence or sex ... to help limit the exposure of young viewers to explicit material" (*Australian*, 8 May 1996, p.5).

The intention here is not to add one more voice to either side of what is a very familiar debate. Whether or not young people are inspired to commit acts of violence as a result of what they see in films and on television, is a question which is well beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, instead of taking the well-trodden route through this issue, it will be suggested here that a more productive set of questions might involve asking why the debate occurs in the form that it does? That is, why is it that President Clinton and Prime Minister Howard seek to solve the problem of violence in the community by modifying the television habits of the family? Why is it that the various governmental tactics aimed at reducing violence in the community, whether as a result of the content of the media or otherwise, always seem to be less than successful? And why is it that more simple conclusions cannot be drawn about issues such as censorship and youth violence?

Taking these questions in turn: first, why the focus on the family? If all parts of the political spectrum deem there to be difficulties with violence among the young, why does the state not attempt more direct forms of legislation to counter the problem? According to writers such as Burchell (1991, 1993), Gordon (1991) and Rose (1993), the answer lies in gaining a better understanding of the way in which modern liberal governments operate. They argue that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the advent of liberalism resulted in a significant change in the basic mechanisms of rule, a change which came about, in part, as a challenge to *raison d'etat*. According to Burchell (1993, p.269), liberalism was sceptical both about the state and state reason, and also about the ability of the state "to know perfectly and in all details the reality to be governed". As Rose (1993, p.289) observes, the advent of liberalism marks the abandonment of the belief in the possibility of a totally administered society. Therefore, liberalism took as its central problem the demarcation of the governable from the ungovernable, of those areas of necessary state intervention from those of autonomy.

However, it is argued that those domains where governmental intervention is deemed inappropriate only exist as a result of more subtle forms of governmental management, such as those operating within "the family". In order to construct the family in this manner it has been necessary to develop mechanisms of government which "operate at a distance". It is through expertise associated with disciplines such as family guidance, welfare, psychology, community medicine, counselling and pedagogy, that the family can at once be private and autonomous, while at the same time being one of the most important sites for instilling the capacities, aspirations and habits required of the population.

In *The Policing of Families*, Jacques Donzelot (1979) points out the central role of the family in the government of children. Since the means of sovereign rule – laws, decrees and regulations – are blunt instruments indeed, Donzelot argues that a far more effective way of governing childhood involved the enlistment of the family in the production of "good" children. This production was overseen by medical, educational and psychological experts who successfully bridged the gap between the inner workings of the family unit and the broadest objectives of government. By what Donzelot (1979, p.169) refers to as the subtle "regulation of images", it became possible to construct desirable and effective norms of family life, motherhood, and childhood, without any resort to the legal system at all. Thus, sites such as the family became crucial in the establishment of a useful grid of norms, norms which were instrumental in constructing the capacities and aptitudes expected of normal, healthy children.

The importance of "government at a distance" is also examined by Vikki Bell (1993). Bell contends that while at once articulating the "privacy" of the domestic domain, a variety of governmental programs also set parents (ostensibly voluntary) tasks to do with the upbringing of their children. Although the cooperation of the family is ostensibly voluntary, this very cooperation is actually vital to the processes of normalisation within liberal societies. Consequently, "the maintenance of a discourse of public/private was part and parcel of the way in which power worked" (Bell 1993, p.394). By reinforcing the merely supportive role that the state ought to play in child-rearing (while at the same time stressing the vital importance of proper child-care and supervision) and by formalising the concept of "parental responsibility", this necessarily augments the significance of the mechanisms by which the child is "governed at a distance" through the family.

The Federal Government's response to the Port Arthur massacre (through the promotion of a v-chip processor, and support for legislation that would delay the screening of violent television movies to 9.30 pm or even 10 pm), is a useful example of such "government at a distance". Since the responsibility for a child's viewing habits still rest with the parents in the home, such legislation would simply enable parents to more effectively manage the conduct of their own children. In this manner, the Prime Minister John Howard, while abhoring censorship, can advocate restrictions by arguing that "his Government along with parents had a responsibility to children" (*Australian*, 7 May 1996, p.2).

Such observations provide the answer to the first question, in that the most appropriate way to deal with the issue of violence in the community is immediately deemed to be the further augmentation of the responsibilities of the parent. In this manner, government operates, not with the most grandiose forms of legislation or conspicuous examples of jurisdiction and control, but rather with more subtle and indirect forms of intervention. Through this strategy, the apparent autonomy of the family unit is preserved (a particularly important criterion in the government-wary USA and the low intervention style of government advocated by the Howard government in Australia), while still managing to address a broad range of social problems, such as those pertaining to violence.

However, the success of this strategy relies upon striking the right balance between managed autonomy and direct intervention. Not surprisingly then, various disputes over the appropriacy of governmental intervention has been a recurrent feature of modern liberalism, particularly in relation to the family. As Bell (1993, p.395) points out, the problem has been to "maintain the notion of a 'contract' with the parents which gives them this sense of distance and of the possibility of autonomy while continuing to monitor their performance, especially around child-care".

This observation concerning the government of the family illustrates liberalism's central dilemma: how to produce the desired regulatory ends (e.g. less violence in the community), without compromising the independence of the various autonomous zones that liberalism itself helped establish – all of which leads to the second question: why is it that government seems to lack success, either in maintaining this balance between intervention and autonomy to the satisfaction of the majority of the population, or in actually achieving any of the ends that it set out to accomplish?

Far from this being a problem, Gary Wickham (1993, p.9) argues that a "perpetual dissatisfaction with government" is actually essential to its continued operation. While not decrying the many mundane achievements of contemporary government, he suggests that government is necessarily never complete, never totally successful. Indeed, if it did not continue to fail, there would be no government. It is through the continually disappointed reassessment of governmental outcomes that more effective programs are introduced, in time only to be replaced themselves by newer and even more effective programs. That is, the successes which *do* stem from programs aimed at reducing community violence – whether through changes in styles of policing, welfare arrangements, codes of conduct in schools, protocols for settling domestic disputes, or even guidelines for appropriate family viewing – are almost always fragmentary, uncertain, and finite. And Wickham is not alone in his assessment. Rose and Miller (1992, p.190) also consider government to be a "congenitally failing operation". They note that the very nature of governmental programs often makes them ambiguous, contradictory, partial and inexact. This heterogeneity ultimately results in the targets of government "refusing to respond according to the programmatic logic that seeks to govern them".

The need to manage specific aspects of youth conduct, especially those concerning violence, exemplifies some of the problems of government. Although different knowledges and programs have targeted youth indirectly through the family, it has been programs within schools and youth organisations (such as Human Relationships Education, values clarification sessions and so on, all of which have attempted, in various ways, to deal with the issue of "youth violence") which encroach upon family autonomy and deal with young people directly that engender debates over precisely where to set limits to government. In addition, not only have there been problems over deciding how best to manage the conduct of youth (in relation to the public/private dilemma), but also the various programs directed at youth often lack success. Attempts to alter the habits of youth have generally succeeded only in demonstrating the limits of government in relation to self-formation. They have, for example, seemingly had only limited success in reforming the conduct of the "violent youth".

Certainly, the relationship between youth violence and violence in the media has been the focus of debate since the Port Arthur massacre, especially in the light of calls for censorship and programming intervention. Generally speaking, two issues are at the centre of the controversy: the relationship between violence in the media and violence in the community, and the issue of state intervention. With regard to the first issue, there is little support for a clear cause and effect. Nevertheless, in the most recent cases where young people have killed, much is made of their exposure to violent videos. In the case of the Port Arthur massacre, the video

Child's Play was withdrawn from shelves of video stores across the country once it was discovered that it "obsessed Martin Bryant, the alleged gunman in the Port Arthur massacre" (*Courier Mail*, 7 May 1996, p.3). Similarly, in 1993, "the British Press made much of the link between these videos (*Childs Play I, II, III*) and the murder of toddler, James Bulger" (*Australian*, 27 May 1996, p.5). These links notwithstanding, it is almost impossible to advocate state censorship. As Frank Devine in *The Australian* (13 May 1996, p.11) argued, "even when it comes to defending children from exposure to violence in the media, it is hard to see any useful thing a State censor can do beyond, perhaps, fine tuning the advisory classification system".

The patchy success that government appears to have in managing the conduct of the population is generally considered to be a consequence of the intricate and multifarious nature of government itself, not to be a function of the issues themselves. After all, whether or not it is appropriate to censor the viewing habits of young people seems a straightforward enough problem. It is this assumption which introduces the third question: why are there such difficulties in reaching a consensus over appropriate ways to deal with youth violence? Why is agreement seemingly so difficult to reach on this issue?

The answer to this question lies in the complexity of the field of debate. First, it is important to realise that the various calls for intervention are not part of a unitary strategy. Competing interest groups, each with diverse and multi-layered agendas (which, in turn, lead to differing regions of agreement or antipathy), have attempted to define the problem in their own terms. As such, the desired ends on any given form of intervention differ markedly. For example, after the Port Arthur massacre, the majority of the community considered increasing levels of violence to be a problem, yet only some would see a lack of media support for state censorship as in any way exacerbating the situation.

A second level of complexity involves the assortment of means and sites through which intervention can occur. Not only is there a range of possible levels of state intervention, let alone zones of government from which such calls for legislation can originate (which may also have their own agendas), there are also different domains which may be targeted for intervention. After all, the family is not the only site through which "government at a distance" occurs. The school has frequently been employed as an effective location for modifying the conduct of specific populations – particularly in the case of anti-social conduct, such as violent behaviour. As McKenzie Wark (*Australian*, 22 May 1996, p.25) argues "if the argument runs that images of violence might have unpredictable ill effects, then the soundest course of action is to ensure that all Australians are educated in how to interpret such images for themselves. This is not universally the case in Australian schools".

A third set of issues concerns disagreement over precisely what counts as appropriate or effective intervention. Given the complexity of the field and the range of groups who have a vested interest in the issue, it is not surprising that such discrepancies exist. In some circles, the autonomy of the family is regarded as too important for *any* kind of overt intervention, no matter how great the distance. Disagreements also exist over precisely what constitutes undesirable levels of violence within the community. Certainly, some regard a degree of violent behaviour (in the playground, for example) as essential to the process of forming an acceptable model of masculinity. Others regard all levels of violent conduct as unacceptable.

Finally, difficulties exist over the ways in which specific media texts are differentially decoded by given individuals and groups. Blanket solutions gloss over the variations in audience readings of specific films and programs. Cartoon violence is a good case in point. It is equally possible to argue that a character such as Master of the Universe constitutes a role model for children, a role model who, in the final analysis, always solves his problems with violence, just as it can be argued that he is harmless entertainment that nobody, including children, takes seriously.

In conclusion, the intention of this chapter has not been to join the debate over the relationship between representations of violence and real violence within the community, nor the debate over whether parents have a significant role to play in strategies designed to address that violence. Rather, the intention has been simply to examine why the various components of the debate appear in their current forms. In doing so, the evidence suggests that disputes over the role of the family in social management, as well as dissatisfaction with both the processes and outcomes of government, are both integral parts of the way in which contemporary government operates. Moreover, it also suggests that, on the issue of the relationship between youth, violence and media censorship, no simple or unproblematic solutions are there to be found, since it is very difficult to draw singular conclusions about what is effectively a multi-layered, complex and changing set of governmental concerns.

For more on film representations of crime and violence see chapters 22, 23, and 24.

Judith Bessant

What the papers say

The media, the "underclass" and sociology

IN COMMON with most OECD nation-states, Australia since the mid 1970s, has been subject to major economic, social and cultural restructuring. The business cycle recessions, new technologies and employment strategies occurring through industrial and economic globalisation, have altered many of the practices and assumptions that shaped Australian's socioeconomic activities since the Second World War. Among other things, this transformation saw the destruction of the full-time youth labour market for 16- to 19-year-old Australians. Unemployment, coupled with a significant increase in part-time work and uncertain employment now characterise the new youth labour market. When associated with other social phenomena like youth homelessness, drug addiction, juvenile crime, delinquency and high rates of youth suicide, youth unemployment animates popular representations of an emergent "youth underclass". Although it lacks the pre-eminent status it has in North America, the idea of "underclass" in Australia has become a popular metaphor for a menacing, complex and inexorable form of social transformation (Katz 1993, p.3).

Scrutinising newspaper portrayals of "the underclass" is important due to the powerful impact of the press in shaping the ways we come to see, know and respond to certain groups of young people, as "poor", "unemployed" or as members of the "underclass". In quite effective ways, media accounts of the underclass help form categories which influence policy and practice. The enormous communicative power, the reach of the media and its capacity to influence community ideas and perceptions is unprecedented. The press, television and radio inform many of us about parts of the world which we otherwise have little, if any, knowledge. Moreover, what many of us know about certain sections of the population, we know through the media rather than any engagement with empirical reality itself.

This chapter builds on a project already started, to trace out a variety of discursive effects that have combined to form the "underclass" category (Bessant 1995, pp.32–48). I concentrate here on exploring the underclass as a category within the vocabulary of the Australian media derived and/or reliant on older traditions in mainstream sociology and social theory. This chapter surveys how sections of the Australian press "discovered" and represented a youth underclass. It argues that most media constructions of the underclass are grounded in and draw strength from a sociological tradition usually referred to as "structural functionalism". In constructing the youth underclass, the press relies quite heavily on commentary from experts who typically represent the underclass as a subversive social force that threatens social consensus and "mainstream society". Furthermore, the media draws on the metaphors and rhetorical figures from a tradition of sociological discourses which are quite antiquated and that have little, if any, explanatory value for issues relating to poverty and changes in the labour market in the 1990s.

Underpinning media representations of the underclass is an assumption that there is a value consensus and social order. This nexus between social order and what is considered to be good and moral relies on the existence of clearly discernible markers that distinguish "them", (the deviant "underclass culture") from the "us", (normal people who are part of "mainstream culture"). Such crude oppositions underpin media accounts of certain "types" of young people. This portrayal of difference codifies a group by its perceived potential and actual threat to social order.

Cohen's framework of moral panic: strengths and limitations

Youth unemployment, juvenile crime and the threat these problems pose to social order have become synonymous in the media and have increasingly been aggregated into the "underclass". The model of "moral panics" popularised by Cohen (1972) has been used to critically analyse the media's role in representing such social problems. Although Cohen's model provides some explanatory value, it also has a number of limitations.

Cohen's work addresses the mechanisms involved in the making of the mass media's images of "threatening" young people. I will not spend too much time outlining this framework as it is dealt with in other chapters of this book. In brief, moral panics are created by the media in an orchestrated attempt to excite the public over an identifiable evil or folk devils. Cohen was concerned with understanding the connections between the media, the political establishment, the forces of law and order, and other expressions of public opinion.

A "moral panic" is about how the media "over-report" a situation which then becomes the basis for a "backlash" moved by public concern or fear over the behaviour of young people. As Cohen argued, the way in which the media initially report a situation can be critical for the progress of a moral panic, because it is in those first sets of images that most people form their lasting pictures of deviance and disasters (Cohen 1972).

Cohen's account of moral panics over mods and rockers in the 1960s illustrated the processes of distortion and exaggeration that can be involved in media reportage on certain folk devils. The news of threat was over-reported and dependent on excesses of language, hyperbole headlines, selective dramatics and misleading photographs. Cohen's account however relied on a naive way of seeing the world that seems to be split simply between the "factual", "objective" and "accurate" material which fed into the stories (Cohen 1972, p.ii).

Cohen's model does, of course, have critics, for example Ben-Yehuda (1990) and Openshaw (1987). Some critics claim that in analysing and defining a typical moral panic "sequence", with the "inventory, the opinion and attitude themes and the rescue and remedy phases", the actors themselves (i.e. the young people), appear as disembodied objects on which reactions are projected, leaving the impression that the folk devils, are in some ways "unreal", or lacking in origins, values and aims.

Cohen also leaves unanswered interesting questions about where the reactions come from, and why the media reaction itself comes into being. Not only does Cohen leave the young people disembodied, but the reactions of the media have an equally disembodied quality. The media could be seen as if they function in isolation and without political context, busily creating fantasies in an embellished and repetitive fashion.

In this way, the reader could be excused for believing that media reports about certain groups of young people, are fantastic exercises that bear little if any relation to the events or experiences of those reported on. The central problem with Cohen's moral panic model is that it focuses only on the "function of the moral panic for the normative order" so that the actual "folk devil" becomes an arbitrary or accidental figure (Braithwaite & Barker 1978, p.28). As Braithwaite and Barker explained, in Cohen's work:

> *The content of the deviant stereotype ... is unimportant. Predominantly arbitrary and accidental forces shape the content of the folk devil stereotypes which suddenly emerge* (Braithwaite & Barker 1979, p.28).

There are other problems with Cohen's analysis and although they do not seriously reduce the significance of his contribution, they do need addressing. Cohen's account also does not consider the life-world of the subjects of the moral panic.

Furthermore, Cohen's account falls short because it does not question the origins and interests involved in the making of moral panics. His model would be strengthened with some recognition of the lived experiences of the young people upon which the media and its audience gazed. Cohen's model needs to be more inclusive in its analysis, to see the moral panic as more than an elaborate fiction.

Cohen's analysis was shaped to a significant degree by the academic context he worked in, namely, the sociology of deviance. Taking a wider perspective, it could be argued that Cohen failed to consider the prospect that a moral panic may serve larger interests than those of the criminal justice and "social control" agencies. That is, can a moral panic only be written about as an example in the history of social control? A moral panic can also reveal certain cultural and economic processes.

Abstracted modes of social science research favour theorising about "objectively gathered" and measurable data over face-to-face anthropological research. Many protagonists of the "structural-functionalist" model of society are also able to talk quite confidently about what "social order" is. They can certainly provide descriptions of what successful "role adaptation" is, and interpret certain groups/types of young people as threats to social order without actually dealing with, being with, or understanding those who are the object of social theoretical attention and public concern.

Given that much of the scientific research and discourses on delinquency, youth unemployment and the underclass is based on little knowledge of the life-worlds of young people, we need to acknowledge the possibility that media representations of the underclass rely on abstracted "discursively constituted" social science categories.

The papers and the underclass

It is not completely clear when the Australian media first began to use the American language of underclass to refer to Australian experience. This rhetorical figure/grouping, however, appeared to have entered the vocabulary of the press by the late 1980s. Central to media representations of the youth underclass has been:

1. the category of the "wild" or "feral" adolescent;
2. the emergence of youth unemployment;
3. warnings about the intensifying effects of an increasing mass of alienated, disaffected, deviant and dangerous young people (presented both as victims and perpetrators); and
4. a "subculture" that is positioned in opposition to mainstream society.

In the early 1980s the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran the headline: 'Life Among the Urban Tribes'. (Note here references to images of primitiveness, savagery and the absence of civility.) Accompanying the headline was a story alerting readers to certain information. It was news that assigned an ambiguous status to unemployed youth by simultaneously portraying them as casualties or victims (of structural unemployment) as well as threats (to social order):

> *Disenchanted young people are forming urban tribes to survive in a world of growing unemployment and economic hardship (Sydney Morning Herald,* 22 January 1983).

Analysing such media imagery of the underclass sheds light on the ways certain social identities are constructed. Media representations of youthful underclass figures reveal underlying assumptions about notions of unity and difference – of who is like me and who is not, who is my supporter or ally and who is my enemy – promoting accounts of social solidarity and antagonisms. This becomes particularly evident when observing the lines of demarcation that classify and distinguish "them from us".

In 1988, Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, carried an article written by leading criminologist, Paul Wilson, who compared "the threat" of contemporary degenerate and debauched youth with the violent hooligans characterised in the book/film *Clockwork Orange (Herald Sun,* 13 January 1988, p.10). Wilson warned of a malaise in the community, signalling the dissolution of civilisation itself:

> *In Anthony Burgess' book* A Clockwork Orange, *and Stanley Kubrick's film of the same name, a chilling picture was painted of future western society. Burgess described young hooligans terrorising citizens and beating up drunks and the elderly just for fun. Violence, senseless destructive and drunken violence marked the world of tomorrow (Herald Sun,* 13 January 1988, p.10).

According to Wilson, Burgess was not only good writer, but he also had the foresight of "a prophet" (p.10).

Wilson's article provided visions of impure and polluted urban/city space. Moreover, evidence of social decay was made worse by its open public exhibition and the "fact" that it lies in those traditionally identified as offering hope for the future – the "cream of our youth". Using language of defilement to recall an incident he witnessed in Sydney, Wilson reported that:

> *I saw them again and more like them – on the platform where my train was to leave. Nearly a hundred young people of both sexes were staggering, lurching and vomiting in drunken revelry. These – the cream of Australian youth – were on display to visitors like me ...* (p.10).

In the search for order, conformity and homogeneity, the perimeters are clearly drawn between the civilised and uncivilised deviant other (that is, the decadent and debauched youth).

Wild undersocialised members of a "youth underclass" are central to such reportage. In May 1986 the *Herald Sun*, ran a story on the explosive nature of certain sections of the population, explaining that "youth crime is on the rise". Readers were informed that "teenage crime is rampant in inner-city Melbourne suburbs like Fitzroy and Collingwood". The forewarning given by a youth worker, fortified fears about the anarchistic potential of unrestrained youth.

> *He will never forget the night a 400-strong mob armed with fence palings, baseball bats and flick knives attacked Frankston Police Station. Twenty-one youths aged between 16 and 21, were*

> *charged with rioting and breaching the peace. Four served jail sentences for their part in the riot. ... Street warfare could easily erupt in Collingwood and Fitzroy Mr Finlayson said. "Teenagers are already discussing it among themselves ... It is only a matter of time before their frustrations build up to a point where they will violently lash out against authority"* (*Herald Sun*, 3 May 1986, p.13).

The *Herald Sun* continued with warfare metaphors, explaining how: "The battle lines have been drawn in the past month after a series of allegations detailing allegations of police brutality and harassment" (*Herald Sun*, 3 May 1986, p.13).

Readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1989 confronted large headlines: "feral, desperate, deluded", "homeless kids on inner-Sydney streets". The figure of young people as both victims and threats, compelled by survival to live collectively off crime recall stories of Oliver Twists, at once villains and casualties of an uncaring world.

> *It's a Dickens of a Life For Street Kids ... They're constantly on the move: sleeping in abandoned buildings and on trains, hanging about the pinball parlours and running about the streets. They live on their wits: pick pocketing, stealing food, stealing clothes from people's lines and dodging the cops* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February, 1989).

"It sounds like nineteenth century London, but it's Sydney today and these are our children" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1989). According to the *SMH* report, young people become "wild", and "return to their untamed and animalistic nature" if they are "not socialised properly". Descriptors such as "feral kids" connoting images of savage and ferocious youth make great news (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1989).

Popular and media explanations of the "wild" or "feral" adolescent and of the resultant "youth underclass", persistently focus on the almost total exclusion of young people from the full-time waged economy.

> *Traditionally waged work has not only been considered important for providing income; it has also been seen to play a vital integrative role. The proportion of children growing up in families in which no-one works now stands at a staggering 18 per cent – about 845,000 children or almost one in five ...* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1993).

Reports of youth unemployment convey moral judgments about the worth of the individual and their preparedness (or non-willingness) to take responsibility for themselves. These accounts are combined with claims about the "need" for young people to be socialised into the virtues of the work ethic at a relatively early age before they learn the "work-shy" ways of their jobless parents. The *Bulletin* (3 April 1990, p.48) warned: "The dole cheque is familiar to both father and son."

News on youth unemployment generates public insecurity about law and order. In part this fear is due to long-standing and widespread beliefs linking joblessness to juvenile crime (Bessant 1995). Popular acceptance of claims that young people are constrained to engage in criminal activities because they are materially impoverished and/or without waged work continues to inform media stories of a juvenile underclass as "a culture" that is simultaneously criminal and poor. Warning of impending danger, the journalists call on "experts" who offer caution about the underclass of kids. As one leading criminologist reportedly advised:

> *Unless things change these youngsters – some of them anyway – are potentially a large young adult group which could be the criminal calls of the future* (*Courier Mail*, 22 June 1996, p.4).

The debauchery and potential criminality of young people is indicative of a "society" having failed in its duty to care and protect youth.

Speaking about Victoria's "crime problem" in 1992, the then Chief Commissioner of police, Mr Kel Glare, described as "Victoria's top policeman", warned that high levels of unemployment were driving young people to crime because they felt cheated by society. Glare argued that unemployment "would create an underclass of young people who might turn against society".

> *We have that many unemployed that we are in the process, I believe of creating a class of unemployable ... If they reject the norms and values of a society which has failed them, then they will follow a path which is not in accordance with the interests of the majority of citizens ... We can only expect our problems of crime to become more severe unless we do something about our socialisation with youth, unless we can provide them with some opportunity to participate in the way in which society is structured* (*Age*, 19 June 1992).

Readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* learned of young members of the so-called underclass growing up in a culture of unemployment and characterised by "dysfunctional families" (identified as women-headed, single-parent families). That "inadequate" parenting, combined with certain "handicaps" means an inevitable degeneration for the offspring of the underclass as they inherited pathological traits transmitted like defective genes from parent to child.

> *In Australia ... the unemployed and the unemployable are highly concentrated ... they often come from one-parent families headed by women; they often have serious handicaps, such as illiteracy; many are resigned to living off welfare for the rest of their lives: and unemployment is passed from generation to generation* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1993).

Finally, in most instances members of "the new underclass" are characterised negatively in the media. They are represented as pathological and opposite to the "normal" or "mainstream" conforming majority. The *Bulletin* summons images of the underclass of the 1980s that stresses its refractory cultural status and warns of a:

> *... sub-stratum, [that] chooses a life-style that is against the mainstream. They don't value the things ordinary people value. They value things others would think undesirable* (*Bulletin*, 3 April 1990).

Reports on warnings from a "panel of business, union and welfare leaders" about the large numbers of young unemployed who could form into "urban guerrilla gangs" relies on the similar functionalist world views that the unsocialised revert to threatening riotous, primal behaviour (*Sun Living Supplement*, 11 February 1986). Similarly, reference to the deviant activities of "Bondi boys" and "Redfern boys", has provided the *Sydney Morning Herald* with embellishment for constructing images of the "boys" as having a deviant status and seditious nature. Their hash smoking, unusual clothes and music appear to have been particularly fascinating (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1989).

As already mentioned, the central features of media portrayals of the underclass rely on concepts derived from the still popular sociological tradition of structural functionalism. Notions of wild unsocialised youth as deviant, assumptions about social order, moral consensus and organistic perceptions of society as a system of interdependent parts are central to the functionalist world view.

The structural functionalist world view

The traditions of sociology were shaped by the functionalism of writers like Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. This was represented in Robert Merton's theory of deviance, and Albert Cohen's work on juvenile gangs. According to such frameworks deviance resulted from maladjustment, and its explanation lay in failed socialisation.

Such problems were associated with bad parenting, broken homes or lapses in the schooling process. Delinquency was a problem with devastating potential. Despite its dangers, however, provided that deviancy was limited it was seen as serving a social function. The treatment (sanctions) deviants received helped mark out for all to see the symbolic boundaries between good and bad. Deviancy maintained, reaffirmed and clarified what was acceptable and what was unacceptable behaviour. This tradition of scientific sociology was also relatively accepting of the traditional Judaeo-Christian concerns with immoral behaviour, especially in regard to drinking, pre-marital sex, prostitution, abortion, homosexuality and other bodily sins.

From the structural functionalist perspectives, the ideas of social consensus and adherence to dominant social values provide the fundamental building blocks for knowledge about "society". Furthermore, society consists of various interdependent and interrelated parts that are busily working together in their individual roles for the overall stability and continuity of the whole system. According to this perspective proper and effective socialisation is essential for creating and maintaining social consensus. Moreover, it is argued that only by internalising the "right" norms and by accepting prescribed social roles can social consensus be achieved. Likewise, social harmony and peace can only exist when each member plays their foreordained roles as mother, daughter, female, boy etc.

There are, of course, varying degrees to which this functionalist account of society is accepted; some people, for example, claim that we are simply puppets whose behaviour is determined by certain social structures; many accept that individuals are shaped by, while also shaping, social roles and "society". Accepting that there is broad range of functionalist interpretations of society, there remains general agreement that effective socialisation is necessary for the achievement of moral regulation. The other side of this is that failed socialisation produces deviancy, immorality and, if it is too widespread, social disarray and even anarchy.

Social theorists like Durkheim placed considerable importance on the role of religion as a binding force that joined people together into a cohesive culture. Culture (that is, shared values, lifestyles, etc.) it is claimed, provides the social cement that connects individual members into one working, fluid system. This is what is commonly referred to as consensus theory.

For social consensus to exist, Durkheim and other functionalists argued that people needed to be integrated into society and that this unity relied on effective socialisation. Adherence to social values by the majority of the population prevented the collapse of society into a morass of disconnected and dispersed individuals. According to the classic functionalists, if people did not conform to their roles, then pandemonium and bedlam would reign. From the traditional functionalist perspective, society is like a biological organism that has homeostasis or a protective in-built mechanism that ensures social harmony and self-regulation.

The concept of "community" frequently appears in media accounts of the underclass. Community also refers to the functionalist stories of *gemeinschaft*. Community is useful in the context of discussions about the underclass; it denotes a sense of closeness, cohesion; however, this imagery of a close-knit social group exists only by the closing of ranks against the "other". Media accounts of the underclass provide an effective technique for excluding large numbers of outsiders from the mainstream community; those who belong to the deviant community are characterised by its deviant/underclass culture.

Arguments about the detrimental effects of modernity and the bad influence of a decadent environment are combined with classic functionalists' accounts of "differential association theory" that relies on the assumption that delinquent behaviour is passed on by associations with "bad" company. This means that if there are many "poor" unemployed young people, they are likely to "infect" others and create a culture of crime or a juvenile underclass. Medical metaphors of communicable disease and contagion are frequently deployed to deliver this message.

Speculations, "diagnosis" and solutions from "socially accredited experts" and moral entrepreneurs provide an important component of press reports. One of the more popular explanations for the problem of a juvenile underclass has been the absence of employment.

Connecting press reports and sociology

Many of today's experts on juvenile crime argue that to survive economically [young people] may turn to crime as a means of making ends meet. As *The Age* reported, accredited thinkers give credence to accounts of an underclass.

> *The causal connection between unemployment and crime is not clear, but there seems to be little doubt in the minds of criminologists and youth workers that there has been a sharp increase in the number of young people who feel marginalised and who have furious, if inchoate, despair about the future* (*Age*, 5 May 1992).

Following the teachings of classic functionalists like Merton, it is said of today's young unemployed people that they are likely to engage in criminal activity because legitimate means to achieving socially legitimate goals have been blocked (*Herald Sun*, 14 July 1989). The competitive cutthroat nature of modern society causes young people to commit crimes because their experience of unemployment results in their detachment or marginalisation, their anomie or rebellion.

Anger about not being able to get a job reportedly results in rebellion, in young people "cutting themselves off from society" (*Sun Living Supplement*, 11 February 1986). Calling on the work of classic functionalist theorists, *The Sun* informs the public of expert opinion that reactions to youth unemployment fall into three groups. Rebellion is said to be the most common reaction, where young people "become aggressive and blindly lash out against society". Retreatism results where disaffected youth "divorce from the mainstream and withdraw into themselves or turn into counter cultures". Finally, ritualism is the type of response which "often involves hard drug use as a way of structuring their lives as if they were working". According to *The Sun*:

> *Ritualism or bringing order to life, ranges from the drug trade to wearing bizarre dress to an obsession with rock music … They are going through the motions of work by buying, using and pushing drugs but the consequences are utterly destructive* (*Sun Living Supplement*, 11 February 1986).

Claims of social incompetence on the part of young jobless people, allegedly caused by an absence of the constraining and socialising influence of waged work, are, however, problematic because they rely on expectations and values of an industrial capitalist social order that is currently in a period of demise. Such expectations rest on functionalist fantasies about social cohesion, consensus and adherence to a set of shared social values which evolved from an industrial society. In a multicultural, post-industrial and globalised context, claims of young people failing to adhere to sets of "mainstream" social values is a nonsense that diverts much needed critical attention from issues more central to changes in the labour market.

Blaming unemployment on jobless young people is a classic "blame the victim" response that is unjust, for no matter how "job ready" young people are, without a commitment to create new jobs, the demand for waged work will continue to go beyond the supply of waged work. Reports that young people are without work because they are unemployable represents "them" as lacking certain skills, illiterate, innumerate and work-shy. Such assertions are undeserved and deceptive. Identifying the cause of youth unemployment within the young person and suggesting that the answer to high levels of joblessness among young people lies in simply addressing deficits, reflects a serious misreading of the labour market and its future directions.

The problems are frequently said to be grounded in class-culture and reproduced from generation to generation. For most, "... the hardships they endure are passed from one generation to the next. It is not just a matter of being poor: their values and behaviour can be askew" (*Bulletin*, 3 April 1990, pp.52–53).

> *The people are destructive because they come from several generations of unstable family background, families whose families always lived in Housing Commissions ... these people have no respect for the individual* (*Bulletin*, 3 April 1990, p.53).

Media accounts of "an emerging underclass" (and juvenile underclass) reflect assumptions that "we" (that is, non-members of the underclass) share in a cohesive, unitary or mainstream culture that is said to be separate or distinct from the culture of the underclass. The *Bulletin* magazine revealed assumptions about the existence of a deviant culture. In a nine-page feature article titled, 'The Underclass: Australia's Social Time Bomb' it was explained how for many members of the underclass:

> *... the hardship they endure is passed from one generation to the next. It is not just a matter of being poor: their values and behaviour are askew. Alcoholism is not uncommon, health is neglected and truancy runs unchecked ... Too often the abused becomes the abuser ... What is intriguing, and even more worrying, is the gradual emergence of a new-substratum:* a breed of young people *who expect society to provide them with the life style of their choice without their giving anything back. They feel no obligation to work and thumb their noses at most traditional social structures: they are a problem for society but not for themselves.*
>
> *These kids are prepared to live on the streets, to exist on petty crime, to sleep rough, sell their bodies, play with drugs. They reject any notion of accountability and embrace a day-to-day existence which often means premature death* (*Bulletin*, 3 April 1990, p.48).

The *aetiology* of the underclass is found in "them", in "their" culture, personal dispositions and motivations. Seldom in such reports are the problems identified as resulting from labour-saving technology, a globalised economy, increasing inequality, rather the problem lies within "the poor":

> *The Underclass is not a question of money or background. Opportunities have been there [and] are there. It is a question of attitude, some people like to live on the edge [of] a very risky lifestyle, where they've got fingers in a bit of prostitution, drugs, bit of dealing, bit of crime. They'll be fairly footloose, moving round from place to place, take on a series of casual relationships, get themselves in all sort of peculiar and nefarious activities, marry Chinese for the money* (*Bulletin*, 3 April 1990, p.51).

Thinking critically about such reports

What makes such claims particularly problematic is that we now live in a period of major economic, social and cultural transformation, much of it centring on the dramatic restructuring of the labour market. One far-reaching effect of labour market restructuring has been its effects on the social distribution of paid employment, especially in relation to young workers. While much of the "popular" discussion has focused on the economic effects of under-employment and unemployment, increasingly in emergent post-industrial societies there has been more attention given to the cultural, political and psychological implications of permanent underemployment.

Reports that youth unemployment causes crime re-ignite fears of an emergent "underclass" and relate to traditions about work and the disciplinary and integrative value of labour. Anxiety is rife because jobless youth are not subject to the governmentality operating in the workplace. Without supervisory monitoring of their conduct, these young people are said to "drift" into activities far removed from those envisaged by the regulating mechanisms of state agencies.

Such reportage reflects and reinstates arguments from functionalist paradigms whose value for analysing the current socioeconomic context is limited, if not damaging, to many young people living in poverty and without waged work. Functionalist accounts of deviance and, in particular, Durkheimian concepts of anomie or formlessness are reflected in media accounts of the young people as members of the underclass. For Durkheim's anomie referred to what he thought resulted from major and rapid upheavals in society. From such a perspective this leads to diminished allegiances by individuals to traditional rules and notions of social order. According to functionalists, anomie also refers to the strain felt when the accepted norms to which people adhere contrast with their lived experiences. That strain, it is said, may be resolved through illegitimate and deviant behaviour to achieve the accepted goals.

Deficit discourses

While examining truancy and delinquency among some Aboriginal groups, Carrington (1990) outlined how deficit discourses render certain behaviours criminal. As a prelude to, or as part of a normalising strategy, certain lifestyles are identified as deficient, defective and contra to mainstream custom. In Carrington's study, "the truancy/delinquency problem" (according to the New South Wales State Government) was a reluctance by certain Aboriginal young people to attend school regularly. That behaviour identified certain young Aboriginal people as "the delinquent" and their parents as negligent, as people acting against civilised social convention and the law. In similar ways young people identified as members of the underclass are marked off from "ordinary" people and mainstream society by reference to their deficits, for not "valuing things ordinary people" do.

The post-industrial society

Critiquing such media reports is not to diminish the experiences of youth unemployment. As mentioned above, it is to question how the problem has been constructed and to argue that high levels of youth unemployment are not due to the irresponsibility of, or deficiencies in, young people without work. Rather, responsibility for much of the poverty and unemployment of young people rests with policymakers, corporate interests and governments who have largely refused to acknowledge the changes taking place in the labour market, and who have also failed to respond by setting in place strategies to amend the personal and social damage caused by the shift to a post-industrial society.

The social impact of the transformation from a feudal order to industrial capitalism was phenomenal; entire communities, families and individuals were obliterated to make way for industrial progress. It seems that a prevalent way of managing the shift to a post-industrial society has been to relocate many of "the problems" associated with the shift on to jobless young people. This has seen the projection of collective insecurities through the retelling of long-standing stories about "idle youth" on those already severely effected by the changes – jobless young people and those living in poverty.

Structuralist functionalist frameworks shape media portrayals of "the underclass", and this is particularly evident in the expressed commitment to the idea of social integration. The construction of "the underclass problem" by reference to concepts such as community, alienation, rebellion, anarchy and unrestrained youth, mirror classic functionalist understandings of "society".

Media constructions of the underclass as a threat to social order become more powerful as they draw on time-honoured narratives about the destructive capacity of the destitute, the immoral, youth and the undeserving poor. According to such accounts, members of the underclass are more than just materially poor; "they" carry potent moral stigma. Typically "the underclass" refers to concentrated slums and ghettos, entrenched idleness and crime where immorality and poverty go hand in glove. Reportedly the underclass is identifiable by certain distinctive traits. It is recognised by "its" especial features that mark the underclass off as different from "us". Those characteristics include: welfare dependence, low socioeconomic activity, high levels of illegitimate births, high fertility rates, large numbers of family breakdowns, large numbers of single-parent families and a prevalence of delinquent/deviant behaviour.

In recent debates the underclass has been used as a weapon in a larger armoury that contests the direction of current and future socio-political development. They are debates regularly carried in the media along with expressions of concern about the potential of the underclass to subvert prevailing social order. This is a common and prevailing message given through the media regardless of the apparent political preferences of journalists, editors or commentators. Those from both the right and left alert us to what they see as the inherent and destructive capacity of "youthful" components of the underclass.

Claims by some that unemployed youth are likely to become criminal have had profound consequences in terms of debate and policy. Increasingly, since the mid-1970s, jobless young people have become objects of extensive socio-political power. Law and order campaigns incorporate more than moral panics justifying calls for increased powers of law enforcement agencies such as the police. Identifying jobless young people as potent criminals also draws very effectively on age-old fantasies and fears about "idle youth".

Note

Structural functionalist assumptions and metaphors continue to pervade many of our taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the world is. As this chapter indicated there are many problems with structural functionalism especially when applying it to contemporary problems. Given the very practical limitations of this chapter, identifying the shortcomings of structural functionalism cannot be spelt out here. Similarly this chapter is not the place to outline an alternative framework. This has however been done elsewhere and can be found in standard sociology text like Giddens, A. 1993, *Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge. For alternatives to structural functionalists' accounts that provide insights into contemporary "youth problems" see the work of Kerry Carrington, Gordon Tait, Howard Sercombe, Christine Griffin, and Peter Dwyer.

Michael Wearing

The crime-youth unemployment link

Textual representations

The director of the Bureau (of NSW Crime Statistics and Research), *Dr Don Weatherburn, said there was a growing realisation that "more police and tougher laws" do not necessarily lead to lower crime rates. He said that in some suburbs where there was high unemployment and a large youth population there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of robberies and thefts.*

The reason for this was that with the lift in the economy there was now more of a market for stolen goods ('Drug reform key to cutting crime', *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 April, 96).

THIS RECENT example of associating property crime with youth and unemployment illustrates a new and revitalised project for crime control. In this chapter it is argued that "statistical laws" are read into the data on youth unemployment and crime to infer correlations between crime and unemployment and these correlations and "laws" are the basis for much policy formulation in the area. Many criminologists and social scientists are rightly sceptical of crime statistics. Nonetheless, other criminologists and crime statisticians are claiming that official data is improving, is more complete and is delivering a more accurate picture of crime (for examples, see Patten 1988; Malka 1990). What is the political significance of these new claims about the truth, or otherwise of crime statistics? What cultural effects do such claims have in the current period of crime prevention and crime control?

In this chapter I use the accounts of crime statisticians and the media to construct a link between crime and youth unemployment, to question public and media claims about the youth-unemployment-crime link.

There are critiques of the crime-unemployment link in Australia (Grabosky 1977; Brown 1980; Malka 1990) and internationally (Chiricos & Delane 1992). Critiques of official statistics are well established in the literature around the measurement of both crime (Box 1971; Cicourel 1976) and unemployment (Miles & Irvine 1979). These critiques assert that official statistics are unreliable and/or politically tainted. In an effort to move beyond these critiques, I advance an argument which places the autonomy of statistical knowledge at the centre of agendas for crime policy. The specific question of "how statistical knowledge governs policy?" is addressed in what follows. Statistical knowledge is seen as a discursive field which governs realities in its own right and according to its own principles (Hacking 1990).

Statistical knowledge

Part of the genealogy of crime-unemployment discourse lies in criminology and its reliance on statistical knowledge. By the end of the nineteenth century, criminology was generally recognised as a specialist field of social science made up of several elements. These elements have been identified by Pasquino (1991, pp.241–48). They include (i) *imputability* or the right to punish based on conformity or nonconformity to social norms; (ii) *social defence* where punishment is based on psycho-social explanations for criminal behaviour, and this social defence mentality is part of the reaction of society to anti-social acts; and, (iii) *neutralisation* or the general requirements of imputability and social defence for a socially hygienic (decontaminated) population that minimises the costs of disorder.

I will link two of these elements of criminology to current statistical representations of crime. Several documents reporting the crime-unemployment link are used to illustrate how interpretations of data are used in conjunction with cause-effects associations of crime in recent statistical reports. The two statistical codes discussed are positivism (a "descriptive and associational empirical" domain that uses quantitative and qualitative facts), and post positivism (a "preventative-reform" domain that uses a mixture of factual accounts, explanations and moral reasoning to argue for prevention strategies and reform). These two statistical codes roughly parallel and relate to the two penal codes mentioned above of "social defence" and "neutralisation" respectively. Much of the research and media reports based on crime and unemployment data conform to either positivist or post-positivist modes of analysis.

While I acknowledge different modes of positivist discourse, at the heart of positivism is the attempt to explain something by showing that it conforms to well established statistical laws (Keats 1979, p.76). Positivist discourses are statements of these laws as regular relationships that hold at all times and are universal in their associations. In Keats's (1979, p.76) words "we can explain something by showing the statements describing it follow as the conclusion of an argument which premises include statements of such laws".

Public discourses and statistical associations

Hacking (1990, p.xiii) argues that the invention of statistical laws in European thought in the nineteenth century were used to control the perception of chaos and the place of chance in the social world. Statistical laws in this period gradually became an objective knowledge generated by "autonomous laws of chance" about natural and social processes. Nineteenth century discourses on statistics interconnected moral reasoning, choice and official truth in a domain to govern social matters (Hacking 1990). As in other intellectual domains, the use of statistical laws in criminology led to the search for specific biological or social phenomena as "causes" of crime.

Today, statistical discourses enable experts to code crime and allow expert interpretation. Other less privileged interpretations are obscured. For example, a feminist re-reading of criminology statistics on crime and young women has recently pointed out that statistical accounts can be unpacked to allow for different interpretations of their significance (Carrington 1993). With the aid of the media, criminal justice and social welfare systems, crime statisticians construct aggregated, stable and ordered accounts of crime.

Statistical governance is a modern cultural and political project that constructs "criminality" and "the young unemployed" within a variety of intersecting discourses. This statistical mode of governance displays an essentialism, identifying the young unemployed as the Other; that plays on images of "degenerates", the "economically unproductive" and those who are "a danger to themselves and others". Statistical laws make rationalities all their own and therefore need to be understood as political representations that have significant effects on the making of crime policy (see Garland 1990).

Criminology and media accounts of the crime-unemployment link fit a particular genre. These accounts are historically repetitive in the imagery of those deemed visible members of the categories "criminal" or "unemployed".

The literature of "crime-unemployment" uses general social constructs such as "the underclass" to enhance the impact of this discourse (Clarke 1983; Bessant 1995). Another example is the evocative image of "the gang". In recent media accounts "the gang" is an organising motif for all the excesses of a life of crime and unemployment. The 1994 anti-gang policy of the NSW Labor Party and media reports of the killing of State MP, John Newman, used the motif of "the gang" to gain attention. Criminologists have been more guarded in their analysis of crime statistics. Some academic reviews of research on crime-unemployment have even made a plea for caution (Chiricos & Delane 1992). But this caution has not done much to lessen the use of "empirical knowledge" in criminology or affect the ways such associations are made, even if only in a guarded or partial way.

Positivism and "social defence"

A Sydney newspaper's story on the 1991 NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Disadvantage Report informed readers that:

> *A new report has conclusively established what to date had been anecdotal – criminals are likely to come from areas of high unemployment and poverty, regardless of whether the crime they commit is assault or theft ... In Sydney, this effectively picks out the working-class suburbs of the inner-west and inner-south, and marks the band of working-class council areas through Canterbury and Bankstown, to the western suburbs of Blacktown, Penrith, Fairfield, Liverpool and Campbelltown* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 November 1994).

This reporting of crime statistics and the findings of statisticians regard as settled that there is a "conclusive" link between crime and unemployment. Certain hallmarks of a journalist's reconstruction of a statistical source are apparent in this media report. This includes: the certainty of association between the two concepts (crime and unemployment); the reading of categories such as "disadvantage" as "the working-class"; and "quick fix" law and order solutions such as the need for more police and more diligent official surveillance of crime.

Nonetheless, there are distinct narrative differences between the sensational reporting of crime by the media and the statistical rhetoric of crime experts. Crime statisticians commonly realise the limitations of their work, especially around the technical problems of using inadequate quantitative data due to poor response rates, biased sampling and lack of representative samples. Statisticians are also keenly aware of their need for a critical distance from media reporting and to promote their own accounts as accurate and real (see for example, Gallagher, Nguyen & Bonney 1994, p.1).

The 1991 report mentioned in the newspaper article above is an example of how the crime-youth unemployment link can be used to mobilise the policy debate. This 1991 report entitled *Disadvantage and Crime in New South Wales* (Devery 1991) contains both correlations on the crime-unemployment link in local government areas of NSW and geographic mapping of the distributions of this link in such areas. The general textual strategy is to organise the statistician's gaze into an efficient, rational and numerically governed surveillance of crime and poverty in NSW. The link of crime to poverty is positivist in that statistical laws are relied upon to determine which socioeconomic factors most affect crime in NSW.

The preface to the report by Don Weatherburn frames this symbolic "pauperisation of crime" within a newer mode and textual strategy, for example, a post-positivist concern for crime prevention that encourages a neutralisation of criminality:

> ... *crime prevention embraces strategies which not only work to reduce offending opportunities but also work to prevent the emergence of communities with high proportions of offenders* (Weatherburn 1991, p.iii).

Weatherburn's later reference to "offender-prone communities" reveals some of the intent of the report, i.e. to break down statistically and geographically the rates of "visible" official crime and unemployment in the community. The text of the report provides a positivist narrative and visual mapping of the dangerous and stigmatised territories of NSW, especially Sydney. At the time, the report received a considerable amount of media attention and has been used as a reference point for public debate on the crime-poverty-unemployment link in NSW.

Working within the rational certainty of statistical laws, the statistician employs considerable technical skills to move the report beyond simplistic correlations that usually appear in media reports. This is achieved by examining the possible "bias" in official statistics and the problematic way in which data is collected by government statistical agencies. This criticism occurs within an extensive review of the literature in the area and allows the space for a recurring plea for caution in the interpretation of such statistics.

The findings are drawn from only one indicator in the crime rates of local government areas (LGAs), that is, "court conviction rates" limited to traditional offences of violence and theft. This narrow "crime rate" is then linked to various "socioeconomic", family and age factors. The positivist "social defence" argument on the crime-youth-unemployment link is thus established. The key to this positivist approach is to identify the crucial social factors/variables that have a statistically significant relationship with crime rates.

The second strategy of the Weatherburn report aims to interpret the aggregated and correlational data for LGAs in NSW. In this section the sophisticated technology and laws of statistics come into their own. Two stages of analysis are used in narrowing 22 independent social variables. In stage 1 cohorts such as high income earners, poor families, unemployed youth and public renters are collapsed into one group for a select few variables developed in stage 2. The shift from 1 to 2 is a multivariate technique that "creates new variables that can summarise much of the variation in the original data set" (Devery 1991, p.43). The author has used a complex statistical technique to reduce "the social" (already reduced in stage 1 to 22 variables) to a few structural variables. In effect, "the social" has been reduced and circumscribed by statistical multivariate narrative in a particularly narrow fashion and as a discursive means to addressing the crime-youth-unemployment links and, more generally, the crime-underclass links.

The construction of social "structural" effects is further limited to a fixed domain that invokes the model of "social defence": finding social reasons about why the rest of society needs to be defending itself against the pauper-criminal classes. Positivist statisticians use this model on behalf of the rest of society in defence against the "dangerous classes". Classes are reduced to a manageable definition by three crucial variables: "socioeconomic status", "family status" and "ethnic status". The preventative fear of an uncontrolled crime rate in poverty-stricken communities (read into the category given of "offender-prone communities") drives the cool positivism of the report. The director of the bureau that produced this report, has publicised the findings in the media. For example, in a statement based on the report that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (12 November 1994) the director states, "criminals are likely to come from areas of high unemployment and poverty". This was followed up with TV news and current affairs coverage, particularly on the ABC.

From this brief analysis of both official and media writing in positivist mode we can ask some more probing questions about the production and public presentation of crime statistics. For example: how are associations of the criminal with "poverty" and images of marginality made visible in public life? How do standard techniques and new social technologies govern the processing of such information? The centrality of the survey as a method for collecting and publishing information on crime makes a significant contribution to this political project. Surveys have a way of reducing the world to endless statistical manipulations of variance in data and into sanitised variable categories for measurement. The positivist model of crime also connects to other modes of surveillance and control in the community (Stanko 1990; White & Sutton 1995). One example is the effect of survey reports on the reporting of youth crime examined below.

Postpositivism: politicising crime and neutralising criminals

> *It is not silly speculation to worry that our crime rate could double, or worse, in the long run if we allow a permanent underclass to occupy large sections of our cities ... Our fear is that two or three decades of continued relegation of more than 300,000 Australians to long-term unemployment may put at risk crime problems closer to those of the United States* (Duncan Chappell and John Braithwaite commenting on the Federal Government's Green Paper on Full Employment *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January 1994).

I do not want to question at length the merit or otherwise of these public statements by criminologists. Such comments, however, illustrate a transition in criminological thinking on crime and unemployment toward explicit moral imperatives for government intervention. These statements are not politically disguised by the "factual" accounting of positivism. The criminologist has entered a postpositivist and explicitly political domain. Positivist criminology supposedly provides the media with accurate information and correlations, letting these facts "speak for themselves". Postpositivism moves into more difficult territory because it entertains the liberal prospect for a "neutralisation" of crime. By retaining the positive science of criminology as well as offering a moral basis for "solutions" to crime, this code is imposed as a rational and reasoned basis for policy development.

One example of the moral narrative of postpositivism is in the reporting of key trends in criminal justice. This statistical accounting claims to promote "more effective coordination and better assessment of the impact of criminal justice policy" (Weatherburn 1991). Such reports are premised on both positivist and postpositivist codes. Statistical laws are invoked to provide a solid and rational basis for claims that trends can be "read off" the graphs and tables provided. For example, the 1993 NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research Report *Key Trends in Crime and Justice* claims to single out key trends for understanding the demands on and effects of criminal justice agencies including law courts, the police and juvenile offenders. At the same time the 1993 report also claims to provide no detailed explanation for certain trends. These claims are open to question by the very selection of certain areas of an agency operation and the categories of crime discussed.

The line graphs in this report are interpreted by the authors. Some of the changes are described as "statistically significant" (1993, p.3). A common positivist strategy of relating these trends to bigger data sets is then emphasised. ABS data from 1992 shows that an increase in non-aggravated assaults from 1982–88 is supposedly explained by increased willingness of the police to report assaults against themselves, and of victims of domestic violence to report to police. Hence, statistical data gathering has benefited by more visible crime which in turn has arisen from the imperatives of crime prevention that emphasise the victim's reporting of crime.

In using these textual strategies the report constitutes an image of "the typical assault victim". The statistical narrative smoothes over the complexities of human difference that may set a context for assault. A kind of legalistic morality tells us that the assault of police and family members is not only illegal but that the individual perpetrator is responsible for this violence and should be punished accordingly. This moral legalism works to the obvious benefit of strong policing and crime control measures. Other interpretations of this violence are ignored or left unstated (see Stanko 1990 for a feminist interpretation). This "moral legalism" also works as a postpositivist strategy that objectifies the social as a place for both social defence from crime and as neutralisation of crime in the community. Postpositivism is reaching beyond strictly "social defence" discourses of criminology to ones that want to neutralise crime.

Postpositivism is a key element to understanding experts' textual constructions of "solutions" to crime. The statistical interpretation of crime and unemployment rates offers such "solutions" within a multifactorial view of these constructs. This analysis relies on statistical techniques such as the multivariate analysis of positivism for suggesting the causes of crime. A recent example of this postpositivism is evident in an article by Wilson and Lincoln (1992) where they argue that a single factor explanation for crime is inadequate. Nonetheless, they are ready to reassert some of the certainties of positivism arguing that certain key factors influence criminal behaviour:

> *... time series analysis and macro-statistical studies do not uniformly confirm the unemployment-crime link. There is still considerable uncertainty from such analysis as to whether there is a link between historical periods of high unemployment and increased crime trends ... Unravelling these statistics is difficult. One theme that emerges is that during depression [where economic indicators are poor], crime rates remain low but in the recession [where only some indicators are depressed], they will increase. A possible explanation is that of relative deprivation – if most people are badly off then an individual does not feel alienated and aggressive, while during a recession, criminogenic forces come into play more strongly as an unemployed person considers his or her lot in comparison with the majority of people who still have jobs* (Wilson & Lincoln 1992, pp.110–11).

The hallmarks of positivism are evident in these statements such as the need for "factors", explanation and certainty in the use of statistics. Postpositivist statements about "causes" are more guarded than positivism and more elaborate in their explanations. In particular, the rhetorical device "criminogenic forces" enables the authors to retreat into positivism when politically expedient and keep away from complex social explanations. The certainty created by such a retreat is deemed necessary to establish a crime-unemployment link.

Whatever the value of the explanation in the Wilson and Lincoln article, the moral imperative in this case is to "do something" about unemployment, particularly youth unemployment. The obvious strategic imperative is to prevent crimes and perhaps reduce the crime rate. Thus we have an example of the "neutralisation" mode of argument. These arguments are used to political effect in causatively locating crime rates in an unequal society. Despite such attempts at association the link is often obscured by the technicality of the explanations.

The postpositivist accounts of the crime-unemployment link are not so concerned to identify single or even multiple factors for the causes of crime. Such material is already available largely as positive knowledge. What is reimposed in such accounts is the search for moral certainties within a more flexible reliance on statistical knowledge. Postpositivism offers the dual imperatives of the search for factual accounts and the insistence on moral reasoning in making the crime-youth-unemployment link.

Localised crime prevention

I now want to return to how statistical discourse enables the fears and irrational associations between criminal activity and social phenomena like unemployment to enter the everyday lives of communities. The rhetoric of crime prevention allows for more cost-efficient and more flexible control of crime. This style of crime control relies on an emphasis on "hands-off" by the state and leaving it to the community to determine what should happen about crime prevention (for a more general discussion see White & Sutton 1995). The paradox of this view is that the state is heavily implicated in the quasi self-regulation of crime in these communities. Governmental "law and order" strategies are supported by the constructions of localised and neighbourhood prevention strategies. For example, the harsh "law and order" rhetoric of State governments, such as the conservative Fahey Government (1993–95) and current Carr Labor Government in NSW, is designed explicitly to neutralise crime and ameliorate the fear of crime in the community.

A variety of local organisations including local councils and community panels, give local accounts of the risks of crime and suggest strategies for prevention. In several instances the documents produced by such organisations illustrate a localising of the "crime problem" and make the everyday fear of crime in neighbourhoods a more "rational" concern. Many of the most recent locality reports reconstruct "the crime problem" as neighbourhood-based and invoke the idea of "offender-prone communities". The local community survey of crime in making crime-youth-unemployment links in working-class communities helps to orchestrate territorial fears and dangers among this population.

There have been several neighbourhood crime surveys initiated by Sydney local councils over the past few years (for example, Fairfield, Waverley and South Sydney councils have conducted such surveys). These locality surveys have assisted in the social mapping of dangerous territories using statistical description of the crime "hot spots". Such reporting is more institutionalised and technical than anecdotal police reports of crime that may appear in local newspapers (although the surveys and the reports probably exploit the same fears of danger in the population).

The report, *A Profile of Crime in Fairfield*, is true to the self-governing projects of crime management. Under the banner of the Safer Neighbourhood Project this report "can reveal some interesting information about crime in the Fairfield LGA if it is interpreted accurately and responsibly with full recognition of its limitations". The report thus reaches for a postpositivist analysis that suggests a higher moral ground than the crime statistics provided by the Police Services Central Office upon which it is based. The report laments the lack of statistics for a "more useful picture of crime in the Fairfield LGA":

> *The data available cannot indicate whether particular areas or locations are "trouble spots" for certain types of crime; or whether people of particular ages, sex, or ethnicity are victimised more than other groups* (Norton 1991, p.1).

The report makes it clear that the self-governing imperative underpins the desire for certain categories of statistics. Both the social defence mode of positivism and the neutralisation mode of post-positivism are evident in this report, so that only tentative assertions about the crime-youth unemployment link are suggested.

Expert surveillance of "dangerous communities" is also promoted and reconstructed in media articles. Such reports are almost a weekly event in local and national newspapers and magazines. Two examples appeared in the *Bulletin* articles in 1991 and 1992. These articles illustrate the project of post-positivism in its efforts to politicise crime and neutralise criminality in particular ways. The 1991 article entitled, 'The Underclass: Australia's Social Time Bomb', clearly links poverty to crime. The sub-heading states: "Poverty and disadvantage are being passed to a new generation, creating a breed of outlaw children who reject all help" (Crisp 1990, p.48). A second 1992 article, 'The Hard Option' dealing youth unemployment and crime extends and repeats the aetiology of crime in "the underclass" debate. This article continues: "As local youth unemployment escalates and its associated underclass mushrooms in sympathy, crime is becoming a simpler more effective life for a legion of kids" (Bagnall 1992, p.36).

The imagery invoked in these articles is that crime is breeding in the dangerous territories of urban and rural Australia and our children are becoming alienated degenerates! This discourse is based mainly on knowledge gathered from criminologists and statisticians that links poverty, crime and unemployment (Bessant 1995).

Statistical knowledge appears to govern much of the conventional wisdom on how to present crime statistics – especially in the case for associating unemployment with crime. It is, however, difficult to gauge the full effects on crime policy of experts and the media's use of this statistical knowledge. Perhaps the effect is not as great as imagined. At one level, it could be argued that criminologists and crime statisticians in Australia have raised the quality of debate about crime and unemployment beyond the sensational reporting by the mainstream media. However, much criminology in collaboration with the media continues to privilege "the statistical" by relying on assumptions about probability, fact-finding and correlations in public debate. Statistical knowledge on the crime-youth-unemployment link has made its own boundaries, its own world of governed selves, and through policy initiatives and media representation has become embedded in the governing mythology.

Howard Sercombe

Youth crime and the economy of news production

DURING THE 1990s, and for probably much longer than that, juvenile crime has been dominant in the registers of social problems in most Western societies. In Western Australia this concern has erupted into public protest, thrown parliaments into disarray, prompted hurriedly-written and far-reaching legislation, and vindicated invasive and sometimes illegal practices by police. Unofficial curfews for young people have been enacted in a variety of locations. Police operations (with codenames like Operation Sweep and Operation Family Values) have attempted to clear the streets of young people, making it safe once again for citizens to go about their business. The extensive powers of the Misuse of Drugs Act have been used to legitimise "stop and search" policies, again directed exclusively against young people who are present on the street.

These measures were not an enterprise of arch-conservative parties in government. They were enacted under a government of social democratic persuasion, with a concern for human rights and social equality. The contradictions involved in this indicate a powerful dynamic around the question of youth and crime, a critical point in the fabric of this society and others like it. This chapter explores one aspect of the youth crime phenomenon: the role of the media, and specifically, the effect that routine newspaper reporting practices have on the profile of youth and crime in a community.

The youth news project

This study comes out of a more general research project on the social construction of youth in the media. The project involved clipping every news story dealing with young people in the general news pages of the *West Australian* over a two-year period, from April 1990 to March 1992. This exercise generated a newspaper clippings file of some 2,683 articles. A computer database was developed, capable of recording, for each article, a number of features, including the topic or topics of the article, gender and race characteristics of the young people reported in the article, the sources of information for the article, and the language used to describe the young people, as well as identifying material such as headline, date and page number. Each article was analysed in terms of these criteria and this information was logged into the database.

Having been organised in this way, it was possible to analyse the representation of young people in the newspaper, using both quantitative (content) and qualitative (textual) techniques. This provides a good indicator of broader social understandings of youth. The focus here is on two of these dimensions. One of these is the overwhelming extent to which youth are represented in the media as criminally involved. The second is the predominance of sources that lead to this over-representation.

Issues in the *West Australian*

A wide range of youth issues are canvassed in the newspaper over the period of the study. The issues raised in a given story were registered in the database, as I indicated earlier, so both quantitative and qualitative work could be done on the representations of youth in the newspaper.

The following charts illustrate the frequency with which certain issues arise in the clippings collection. The data were registered in two different ways: first (Table 1a, 1b), any issues that appeared in an article were logged. One story could therefore register several entries. Read together, the issue headings tell their own story of the construction of youth.

Second (Table 3), data were registered with only the dominant issue logged for each story, and fewer, broader codes were used.

The most striking feature of the data in both Table 1a and 3 is the dominance of crime categories. If the frequency of articles on youth issues represents a kind of cultural or discursive landscape, the biggest mountain on the landscape is that of crime. In Table 1a, nine out

Table 1a: How often do different issues appear in the West Australian?

Issue	*Number of articles*	*% articles*	*Issue*	*Number of articles*	*% articles*
Crime (miscellaneous)	553	20.6	Sex	53	2.0
Crime punishment	346	12.9	Suicide	52	1.9
Crime: motor vehicles	302	11.3	Crime: yp as perpetrator	50	1.9
Education	228	8.5	AIDS	49	1.8
Crime: young person as victim	224	8.3	Public nuisance	48	1.8
Crime prevention	217	8.1	Crime: rights of offenders	47	1.8
High speed car chases	186	6.9	Homelessness	45	1.7
Sex crime	181	6.7	Young people as workers	45	1.7
Violence	165	6.1	Missing person	44	1.6
Drugs	160	6.0	Crime: attack on householder	41	1.5
Policing practices	152	5.7	Poverty	40	1.5
Rights of young people	130	4.8	Demonstrations or riots	39	1.5
Unemployment	121	4.5	Morality	38	1.4
Health	96	3.6	Racism	37	1.4
Motor vehicle accidents	90	3.4	Abuse: sexual or other	35	1.3
Accidents	87	3.2	Charitable works	32	1.2
Involvement in politics	79	2.9	Truancy	31	1.2
High achievement	71	2.6	Exploitation of young people	30	1.1
Crime: causes	69	2.6	Crime: outback station solutions	28	1.0
Youth work as solution	62	2.3	Disability	26	1.0

of the top 10 issues in terms of frequency are associated with crime. Table 3, using the Broad Issue scheme of classification, indicates that crime accounts for almost two out of every three articles in the collection: 1644 of the 2683 articles collected for the study.

The next largest category, health (which included topics such as AIDS, drug use and suicide) registered 242 articles. Homelessness was recorded as the dominant issue in only 36 of the stories in the study, despite significant interventions on the issue by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in this period. Unemployment, one of the most significant areas of debate in policy terms, was included in the Economic Issues category (along with youth wages, exploitation of young workers, etc.). Only 145 articles were recorded as being primarily concerned with economic issues (see Table 3). Table 1a, indicates that 121 of these were concerned with unemployment.

For Aboriginal young people, the focus on crime was even more emphatic. Eighty-seven per cent of articles that identified young people as Aboriginal were primarily about crime. None were about homelessness, nor, at least outside the sports pages, about Aboriginal young people as high achievers (see Sercombe 1995).

Youth and crime

There is nothing new in pointing out the link made in the news about young people and crime. The study confirms other research (Hall et al. 1978; Cohen 1980; Pearson 1983; Scott 1984) in finding that the principal part played by young people in the daily drama of the newspaper is the role of the criminal. However, it is a phenomenon that requires some explanation. Attention needs to be paid to the dynamics that lead to the representation of young people, especially Aboriginal young people, as criminal, and to the effects of this on the place of young people in society.

One reason for the preponderance of crime categories might be that the newspaper is just reporting the facts, that young people are portrayed as criminal because they are. Young people are routinely over-represented not only in newspaper accounts of crime but also in

Table 1b: Issues appearing less than 1% of the time

Issue	*Number of articles*	*Issue*	*Number of articles*
Young people as soldiers	26	High achievement: non traditional field	11
Graffiti	23	School uniforms	10
General problems of youth	21	Spirituality and religion	8
Intergenerational relations	20	Vandalism	7
Immigration	19	Crime on trains	6
Risk-taking	19	Eating disorders	3
Age of responsibility	18	Involvement in Environmental issue	3
Yp as the future	18	Adoption	1
Pregnancy/abortion etc	17	Crime: escapees	1
Crime against the elderly	16	Young people and the Economy	1
Training	16	Achievement against the odds	1
Gangs	14	Subcultures	1
Financial: credit etc	11	"Influences: TV, video games etc"	1

most indicators of criminal behaviour. The peak age of arrest for people charged with crimes against property is 16. Crimes against the person peak between 19 and 23 (Eckersley 1988, p.12). These figures need to be read cautiously: for example, if young people are policed differently, (and they are) this is going to impact on arrest rates. But it is probably safe to suggest that young people offend at higher rates, at least in certain categories of crime like burglary and car theft, than other age-groups. The categories of crime in which young people offend, as opposed to other categories like white-collar crime, are likely to be those with direct impact.

However, the number of young people arrested in any one year accounts for only a tiny proportion of the youth population: 96.3% of young people in Western Australia did not go to court in 1993 (Crime Research Centre 1994). Youth unemployment affects far more people (running close to 30% for much of the period under study) and is arguably of much greater long-term concern not only in the broader population but in the minds of policy-makers, at least at Federal Government level. But in only 121 articles in the sample, or 4.5%, is unemployment an issue. Similar arguments could be made about homelessness, acknowledged in only 1.7% of news stories. The prevalence of a particular category of youth news doesn't seem to have much to do with frequency or representation.

The kinds of crime in which young people are involved do have a common impact. Victims of housebreaking or car theft are not rare. But research by the South Australian Crime Prevention Unit (1993) indicates that personal experience is not the most influential factor in perceptions about crime. Concern about crime comes overwhelmingly from the media, rather than from personal experience or the experience of friends or family. The veracity of media coverage may be established by the rather less frequent supporting instances of people's own experience, but the media seems to be the dominant force. The origin of the dominance of crime seems to lie in journalistic practice itself, in the way that journalists identify and collect news.

Table 2: What sources are cited in articles about youth?

Source	*Principal comment*	*Secondary comment*	*% principal comment*
Police	514	637	81
Court	515	543	95
Govt: minister, bureaucrat	292	444	66
Public: via letters to editor	199	199	100
Organisation-non govt	87	184	47
Young person	107	165	65
Parent	66	109	61
Report: research, publication	83	100	83
Overseas press agency	82	87	94
Opposition	41	75	55
Expert	44	71	62
Lobby group	41	70	59
Teacher, education official	50	69	72
Crime victim	46	63	73
Conference	43	56	77
Business	28	53	53
Academic	31	51	61
Youth worker/youth work organisation	29	46	63
Church/clergy	26	42	62
Inquiry: royal commission etc.	33	41	80
Union	19	40	48
Journalist	21	29	72
Parliament	17	25	68
Emergency services	13	19	68
Local government	10	16	63

Journalistic practice and youth crime news

Table 3: Main issue (simplified code): Frequency

Issue	*Frequency*	*Per cent*
Crime	1644	61.3
Health	242	9.0
Misadventure	156	5.8
Place in society	118	4.4
High achievement	57	2.1
Homelessness	36	1.3
Education	215	8.0
Economic issues	145	5.4

Journalists have a job to do, the job of creating news. Each day, within a rhythm of production in which the deadline is paramount, they must gather discourse capable of being transformed into "news", and gather enough of it to fill the "news holes", the spaces between the advertisements and other contents, for that day (Tiffen 1993, p.174). This process is not easy or straightforward. The process of deciding which fragments of discourse get into the newspaper from the oceans of talk that a society produces every day relates to a complex set of criteria generally referred to as news values (Bell 1991, p.155ff). Some of these criteria are to do with the quality of the material itself: how intrinsically interesting (attracting, compelling) it is. On this score, crime news rates well. Market research for the *West Australian* indicates that crime and law and order news always takes either first or second spot of the index of most popular issues (interview with Paul Murray, editor, *West Australian*, 12 January 1995).

Crime news scores repeatedly on the catalogues of news values provided by Galtung and Ruge (1973) or any number of other analyses of news media carried out since (e.g. Bell 1991; Anderson & Itule 1988; Tuchman 1978). Using Bell's catalogue, crime news fits the criteria of *negativity*: it is concerned with conflict, with deviance, with damage and injury, sometimes death. Crime news works in terms of *recency*, of *proximity*, of *unexpectedness*, it can often be cast in terms of already-understood stereotypes (*consonance*), is usually clear-cut, so meets the test of *unambiguity*. It is at the same time both local and dramatic, familiar and exotic. Because petty crime is relatively commonplace, it meets criteria of relevance, and crime stories, because they involve individuals rather than faceless corporations, lend themselves to *personalisation*. There are no problems with the *attribution* of sources, nor with the *facticity* of accounts of events: crime news is subject to official processes which cover both of these criteria.

These catalogues of news values are essentially descriptive. While there are several such catalogues, substantiated analysis of *why* negativity, for example, sells newspapers is thinner on the ground (Bell 1991, p.156). They tell us what kinds of things people are interested in, but they don't tell us why. Clearly, there is something about crime, and about the depiction of young people as criminal that connects with the audience of the newspaper, that gets the juices flowing.

Carl Wright Mills (1959) asserts that social issues indicate some "contradiction" or "antagonism" in the social structure. The status of youth is itself riddled with contradictions, predicated as it is on the artificial delay of adult accreditation despite adult development. This set of tensions creates an anxiety on which almost any matter involving youth becomes a social issue.

Negativity is a quality of such contradictions or antagonisms. It is a forewarning of crisis, and we need to know about warnings. The use of certain drugs by young people indicates, for many people, a disillusionment, a malaise, an alienation of the young, which introduces uncertainties about the future, about the reliability of those into whose hands we bequeath what we have built. The exposure of young people to processes of unemployment or exploitation raises questions about the claims of institutional systems and of the system as a whole to deal fairly and justly, and exposes routine injustice at the heart of such systems. The imminence of danger as involved in high speed chases or violent house break-ins call for action, for protection, for self-defence.

Tensions and fears such as these provide the "hook" on which the interest of an audience, of a community, is caught. We fear because surviving an alienated life depends on the thin padding of commodities, for which we have worked hard and which are fragile and easily lost in the inherently unstable economic system in which we live. We fear because making a living, in a city designed around a piece of individual transport technology, depends on the technology being ready and working, and we are vulnerable. We fear because suburbia means an isolated house unconnected, undefended and surrounded by darkness. We fear because our lives are enclosed in the massive infrastructure of Civilisation, and yet Civilisation is a brittle veneer over chaos. We fear because death, despite all our artifice, is always at our elbow. This anxiety is what gives hard news its bite and what makes material intrinsically "newsworthy". Youth news, and doubly youth crime news, has got it.

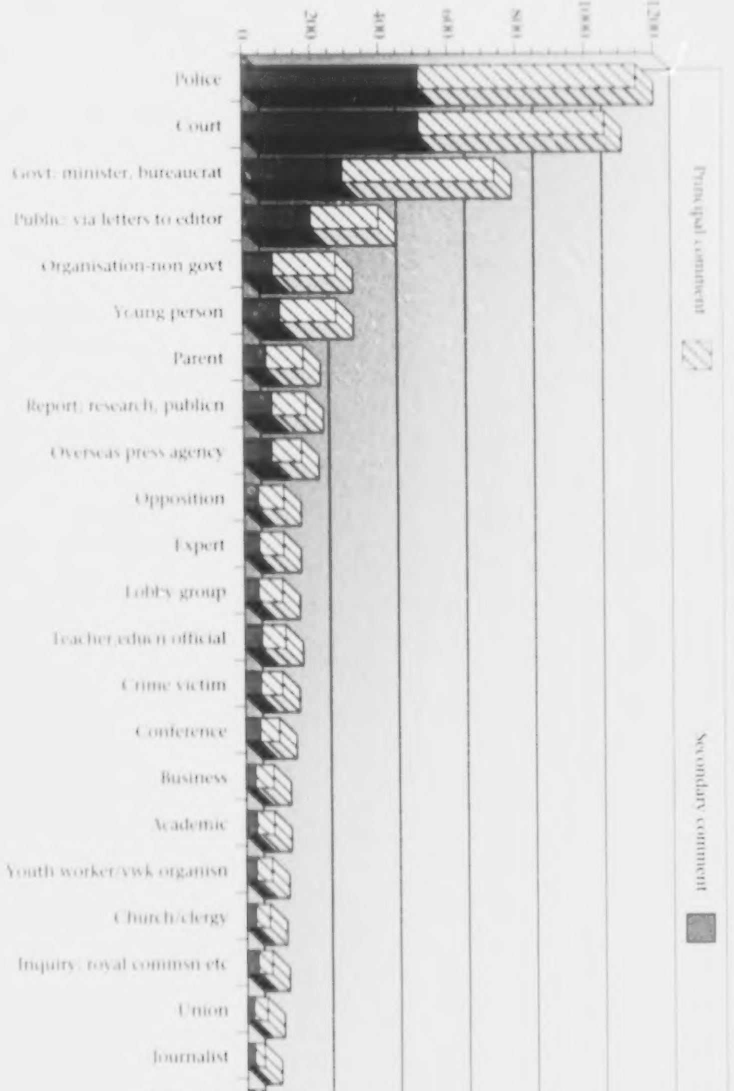
Newsworthiness is not only a quality of the story, however. Newsworthiness also depends on how easy it is for material to fit into the news-making process, rather than intrinsic qualities of the story. One of these criteria is *periodicy*. Events that correspond to the period of production, events that are completed within one day, have a much better chance of being reported than events that extend over a longer period. Crime reports have no problem here. Even if the crime itself has had a long history, the arrest and court process fall neatly into the newspaper's requirement for periodicy.

A further criterion is *attribution*. Journalists rarely have the time for original research, to pursue the romantic image of the investigative journalist burrowing through the maze and mire of social and political events to secure the scoop or the scandal (Tuchman 1978; Tunstall 1971; Tiffen 1993). Most news gathering relies on the regular outpourings of institutional sources geared to producing news, sources who are able to make time available for the generation of discourse which is suitable and available for transformation into news (Murray 1995; Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987). News coming through such channels is inestimably cheaper to produce than news which requires a journalist to independently find a newsworthy event, to search out authoritative discourse about the event, and to create news text from scratch. Particular institutional sources volunteer news copy, in the form of press releases or conferences, or invitations to cover events. Sources may also be sought out for comment on issues placed in the public forum either by some other institutional source or by journalists themselves. By recording the sources of youth news indicated in a story, some idea may be gained of which sources dominate.

Figure 1 gives an idea of the kinds of sources that speak most frequently in the newspaper about youth, and whether they make a primary contribution to the article, or make responsive or secondary comment.

A large number of voices speak in the newspaper about youth and matters affecting them. However, not all voices speak with equal volume or frequency. Access to the newspaper, as many commentators have noted (Hall et al. 1978) is not equal, and the inequality is a structured phenomenon, not merely random. Figure 1 is dominated by three sources: the police,

Figure 1: What sources are cited in articles about youth



the courts and government ministers or spokespersons. The courts were the primary source for 19% of news stories concerning young people across the 2683 items collected. Police accounted for an additional 19%.

Both significantly outweigh the voice of government ministers or departments. Government sources were primary sources in only 11% of the stories. When stories in which no source could be identified are excluded, police and courts together accounted for over 48% of primary sources.

One might suspect some double-counting here, with police and courts commenting in the same articles. This is generally not the case. Police and courts were recorded as *both* providing comment in only 29 stories (police evidence in court having been counted still as a court source).

What I found, however, arising from the relationship between police, courts and journalists, is one event being reported several times over a period of time. If an offence is reasonably newsworthy, the paper will run a report of the original event, sourced usually by police and with comment from the victim. Another piece might run when a suspect is apprehended; another when they first appear in court; assuming they are remanded, another when they appear in court again; another when they are sentenced. This contributes to the quantity of crime news reported.

The frequency of reporting is self-reinforcing. The news value of *continuity* decrees that "once something is in the news, it tends to stay there" (Bell 1991, p.159). In addition, sources that produce worthy output only infrequently are much more difficult to collect news from than sources that regularly and predictably produce news copy. Authorised spokespersons are harder to contact, their authority is not well-established, they are less experienced and know less of the news organisations' requirements. In the case of the police and the courts, both are well acquainted with the media and have a mutually reinforcing system for the predictable (therefore time-efficient and cheap) output of stories. Police forces have well-established media branches, which conduct daily press conferences, informing journalists not only about crime events but also indicating which cases are to go to court, and therefore setting up the ideal news situation: the news event which journalists know about in advance.

Notwithstanding this facility, journalists are often restricted in their reporting of crime news because coverage could be seen to be prejudicial to a case about to come before the courts. Paradoxically, in the case of crime news involving young people, this barrier is removed because of Child Welfare Act provisions which prohibit the naming of young people alleged to have committed offences. If a defendant cannot be named, the report cannot be prejudicial. Journalists are therefore freer to report youth crime, and have more points at which to report, than is the case for adult crime.

On all these counts, youth crime scores. In both newsworthiness and access, youth crime news provides a cheap, easy, profitable source of news. As a result, according to media analysts, a close relationship develops between the media and police in which journalists are given privileged access to crime stories, and the police are given privileged access to the media. In comment during the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, Commissioner Dodson heard evidence from a former journalist that "police handed the media a big portion of their bread and butter". According to the journalist, "it was not uncommon for unedited police media releases to go into a newspaper", and "stories would not get printed if they were critical of police, who had regular meetings with editors and supplied many of the headlines" (*West Australian*, 10 May 1991, p.33). Although details were disputed in the Commission, this evidence is supported by Grabosky and Wilson's (1989) research into links between the media and police. I have a notable example on file in which the police refuse to talk to a journalist who has been critical of their efforts in controlling the spread of amphetamines (*West Australian*, 28 December 1991, p.3). Certainly, in the clippings collection, there is evidence of a relationship in which the newspaper gives police a privileged voice, and treads softly when police are criticised, although the newspaper does print stories critical of police, and increasingly so in the period under study.

The relationship between police and journalists is well documented (Roshco 1975; Grabosky & Wilson 1989). However, the role of the courts in augmenting this relationship and in providing a further source for crime news has not been adequately recognised. The courts provide as many stories on youth news as the police in this study, and use of the courts as a source effectively doubles the amount of crime news reported. Simple economics appear to prevail. Crime is cheap to collect from Children's Court beats. The costs down the line, the social costs, in terms of the impact on the lives and liberties of young people, are something else. This was essentially Commissioner Dodson's concern: that this overemphasis on crime news fed the matrix of circumstances that led to Aboriginal people dying in prisons.

Effects of the focus on crime

The question of the effect of news coverage is difficult to answer simply. The idea that consistent coverage of a population group that emphasises certain attributes will have some effect on how members of that group are seen, stereotyping the group and limiting their repertoire of ways of being, is a standard research position (e.g. Durell & Lumsden 1986; Berelson & Salter 1973; Young 1973). It underlies much of the work that deals, for example, with representations of women in the media, or representation of particular racial groups, or people with disabilities. It seems difficult not to accept that consistent representation of a group over a period of time has an effect on public opinion and on the group itself.

The exact mechanism by which media representations impact on public perceptions is much harder to tie down. There is no one-to-one correspondence between media representations and public perceptions of a group, or a group's perceptions of itself. People's use of media output, how they read a particular event, what they believe and what they don't, depends on a range of complex factors (Hall 1980; Morley 1980). Media representations and interpretations of events are most powerful when they confirm existing opinions of audiences, or when audiences have few independent sources of information (Roshier 1973). In the case of young people and crime, this fits. Court appearances are not part of the routine experience of most people, and because of the separation from the experience of young people due to the age-stratification process, press coverage of crime is likely to have a significant effect. This is supported by research indicating that people's perceptions of the rate of crime correlate with the rate of news reports of crime, rather than the incidence of crime itself (Davis 1952; Bell 1960).

Whatever the extent of public perceptions of youth, however, it cannot be denied that this over-representation of youth as criminal has had a political impact. In general, the discourse of the past Labor Government in Western Australia, at least in the policy-making arena, has fallen within the expert-criminology framework, in which harsher sentences were seen to be counter-productive and attention to the social origins of crime more fundamental in the effort to reduce crime. However, this discourse has been vigorously contested by a more populist law-and-order discourse that represents offenders as a particular class of human being, emphasises the need for protection from criminals, and posits stricter punishment and deterrence as the policy solution. With the advantage of greater access to the press, this latter discourse has at particular points overwhelmed the more established, rational policymaking framework.

The paradigm example of this is the political struggle around the issue of high speed car chases. In an environment of extensive reporting of the high speed car chases issue, and in the wake of the media-sponsored Rally for Justice which drew a crowd of 30,000, the WA Government was forced to act. The now notorious *Crimes (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act (1992),* against all previously declared Government policy, instituted mandatory indeterminate sentences for certain classes of offenders. Until forced to amendment, the draft Bill referred only to young people, and it was clear against whom the Act was directed. Police forces were able to establish mostly unofficial policies of intervention into the movements of young people, such as unofficial curfews and policies of harassment against "potential offenders" (*West Australian* 18 May 1990, p.4, 17 February 1992, p.5). (Potential offenders are, of course, members of those groups of people likely to offend. Such groups are established in part by public representations, like those in the media. In particular, young people are meant, especially Aboriginal young people).

The popular image of rampaging youth gangs ruling the streets, kept in check only by the "thin blue line" of the police, has been fed and maintained by this prevalence of crime news. It has served as a basis for almost unchecked police autonomy and immunity from criticism. For example, when police practices, especially those involving police violence, have been questioned, Commissioners of Police and Police Union sources have been able to employ the image to argue that if these kinds of complaints gain currency, police morale will be harmed, and the "thin blue line" will collapse, leaving the State to the anarchy of violent youth.

As a result, police have been able to command support from politicians in the face of community criticism, even where police actions have been indefensible. For example, the challenge to official and unofficial policies contravening young people's human rights was taken up by Human Rights Commissioner Brian Burdekin in a series of interchanges with the then Premier, Carmen Lawrence, and Assistant Police Commissioner Zanetti in early 1992. Commissioner Zanetti at first denied assertions that police were issued with a directive to harass young people who were on the street. Despite a concurrent parliamentary inquiry that reported significant abuses of power by police against young people, the Premier was reported as saying that she had "seen no suggestion that they are doing it (harassing offenders)" (*West Australian*, 7 March 1992, p.5).

This situation may have begun to change, largely as a result of the combined effects of a number of authoritative reports and the Dethridge case (in which the bashing of a young person was unwittingly recorded on police video). The *West Australian* seems more prepared to confront examples of police abuse than previously. However, violations against young people's civil rights continue into the present, including indiscriminate searching (legalised under the Misuse of Drugs Act, that allows arbitrary search and entry if illegal drugs are suspected) and detention. Under a clause of the Child Welfare Act allowing police to return lost children to their parents, police have been able to apprehend and detain young people without arrest or even suspicion of committing an offence. These provisions have been used to enforce an unofficial curfew against young people in various parts of the city. Fundamental rights of free movement and assembly have been contravened on a regular and deliberate basis.[1]

These actions continue largely without challenge and without publicity (or challenges are easily silenced) despite attempts by youth advocates to take the issue into the public sphere. They are actions that should not be tolerated in our professedly liberal democratic society, for any group. They are maintained in the current environment under a general assumption that street-present young people are criminal and therefore worthy of this degree of surveillance and intervention. While such an apprehension might come from several sources, the media is certainly a prime mover in the construction of youth that assumes a criminal tendency.

The dominant construction of youth in the press as criminally involved is one that has significant implications for the human rights of young people, and especially Aboriginal young people. This construction owes a substantial part of its currency to the access that a newspaper like the *West Australian* has to police sources and to the Children's Court. While the relationship between police and journalists would be difficult, at the political level, to control, police sources are matched by the Children's Court in the output of youth news.

The Children's Court is already a restricted environment. This study supports the contention that this restriction should be extended to exclude the media or to significantly limit its access to the Children's Court. In this way, some of the paranoia concerning young people might be avoided, and a greater sense of their rights might find more sympathetic soil.

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1 At their height, these operations simply involved police setting up a presence in nightspots like Northbridge and Fremantle and bundling every young person they saw into the back of a police van and taking them back to the station or some other holding facility. Using Child Welfare laws which allow for police to take "lost children" home, police are able to take young people under the age of 18 into custody and telephone their parents to come and pick them up. The young people concerned had not committed any offence, nor were they suspected of committing any offence.

Susanne Davies

A sight to behold

Media and the visualisation of youth, evil and innocence

BEFORE ME lies the front page of a Melbourne newspaper, the *Herald Sun*. Dated 26 November 1993, it features a half-page colour photograph of a young boy. Neatly dressed in school uniform, his eyes are directed slightly right and upward of the camera. His lips are parted, just enough to expose a hint of two juvenile front teeth, yet too little to suggest a smile. He looks uneasy, as children sometimes do when asked to pose and "smile for the camera". This photograph would be unremarkable were it not for the identity of the child and for the story which his face purportedly tells. For this is not any child. It is Robert Thompson, who in the company of another ten-year-old, Jon Venables, abducted two-year-old James Bulger from a Liverpool shopping centre and beat him to death with bricks. Images of Venables and Bulger also appear on the page. A blurry school photograph shows a smiling Venables. It is captioned "cunning and wicked". In the top right-hand corner is a small oval inset of Bulger. Its informality and shape is reminiscent of the style of photograph so often found in family albums or atop sideboards or mantlepieces. These images, however, are dwarfed by Thompson's. Next to his photograph is a headline in unusually large print, 'Face of Evil', and beneath his image, a caption which attributes to him "a cold, evil smile". Completing the page and linking the photographs of Thompson and Venables are the large, underlined words of a policeman:

> *I believe human nature spurts out freaks. These two were freaks who just found each other. You should not compare these two boys with other boys – they were evil* (*Herald Sun*, 26 November 1993, p.1).

The details of the Bulger case will be familiar to most readers. Its worldwide prominence stemmed not from the fact that a child had been murdered, but rather from the revelation that, at least in terms of years, Bulger's killers were themselves children. At the time of Thompson's and Venables' convictions, the *Herald Sun* devoted almost seven pages of a single edition to the story. Following the front page I have referred to, are multiple reports which detail at length, the crime, investigation and trial, the responses of various participants as well as the ponderings of assorted experts. The question of "why" permeates the coverage, and in response to it, various answers ranging in tone from suggestion to assertion are presented. Family breakdown, a pre-pubescent sexual fantasy, a split personality, genetic and environmental factors including the influence of video nasties are all predictably cited. Underlying these, however, is a constant insistence upon the "evilness" of the perpetrators, in particular, Thompson. There is a suggestion that his evilness not merely exists but that it can be *seen*. A policeman's recollection of Thompson features in a headline that stretches across two pages: 'That terrible chilling smile' (*Herald Sun*, 26 November 1993). Alongside it, is a photograph of Thompson. It is the same image as that which appears on page one, and which is again replicated on page five. These multiple images of Thompson are only outnumbered by those of his victim. The face of James Bulger is incorporated into the heading 'The Bulger killing' and appears on every page. Despite its frequency, the image is small. This, however, merely serves to emphasise the relative difference in size and strength between Bulger and his killers. These visual representations also allude to a more fundamental distinction, that between evil and innocence. If Thompson's is "a face of evil", then Bulger's is a face of innocence. But how can this be? How can photographs be attributed such extraordinary truth-telling powers and what is it, anyway, that we see? What can a simple photograph tell us about youth, evil and innocence? These are the questions which I seek to address.

Seeing is believing

Photographs, particularly those which feature as part of news stories, are commonly attributed a degree of veracity not usually extended to other forms of visual representation. They are presented as if offering a transparent record of the real. American photographer Paul Strand (1980, pp.141–42) once claimed that photography's most important contribution and *raison d'etre* lay in "a complete uniqueness of means ... an absolute unqualified objectivity". Objectivity, he considered to be, "the very essence of photography". Underlying this assertion is the familiar assumption that photography, done properly, will capture the real. And yet anyone who has taken a photograph, even with due attention to method, will know that reality rarely translates adequately to film. The spontaneity of a moment, like the idiosyncracies of a child or the vastness of a landscape, are more often than not lost, as time, space and motion are frozen within a single frame. Shortfalls in the photographic image, however, are compensated for by personal recollections and collective knowledges. The activity we call seeing, whether it be directed to a photograph or an object before us, necessarily involves interpretation and contextualisation. It is only through these interrelated processes that the real world and representations of it are made meaningful. The production of visual representations like the photograph, and the sense that is made of them, cannot therefore be separated from the historically and socially specific contexts and frameworks of knowledge within which they are produced and seen.

The privileging and use of photography as an objective means of visual representation has its basis in the development of enlightment epistemology and practice. The Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fostered a reconceptualisation of human beings and their place in the world. Understandings which emphasised the coexistence and interdependence of humans and the natural world were gradually displaced as the fundamental difference and superiority of "man" began to be asserted (Merchant 1980). The capacity to reason was posited as distinguishing humans from other life forms. Moreover, the exercise of reason was lauded as the sole means by which accurate knowledge of the natural world and mastery over it, might be attained (Lloyd 1984). The achievement and exercise of reason according to Descartes, its greatest advocate, required a separation of mind from body, and a distancing of the observer from the observed. Only through the adoption of a supposedly objective position, one free of bodily passions and pursuits and removed from the object of study, might true knowledge be arrived at. Observation, quantification and empirical testing were advocated and increasingly deployed with the assistance of technology, as the rational means by which rational men might know their world. The located, embodied and partial vision of those who observed thus became neatly disguised by "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Harraway 1988, p.581).

This privileging of reason both involved and was constructive of a further shift in the organisation of knowledge. Foucault (1973) has characterised this as a move away from an emphasis on resemblance towards an emphasis on difference. In his words,

> *... the activity of the mind ... no longer consist[ed] in drawing things together, in setting out on a quest for everything that might reveal some sort of kinship, attraction, or secretly shared nature, but on the contrary, in discriminating ... discrimination impos[ed] upon comparison the primary and fundamental investigation of difference* (p.55).

While the capacity to reason was posited as distinguishing man from beast, the means by which this capacity was to be fulfilled and exercised, served to distinguish some humans from others. Women and the labouring masses, like the indigenous populations of soon to be colonised lands, were readily associated and indeed equated with nature and physicality. Rather than being seen as the possessors and practitioners of rationality, or of some other equally valid mode of thought, these individuals increasingly became the objects of rational enquiry. The enlightenment produced a framework of knowledge which, in emphasising difference, contributed to the very construction of difference. Empirical methods and their use, framed by this new emphasis, claimed to "prove" that such differences were inherent and immutable. Thus within a single century, for example, men and women who had been seen as more alike than different and as even sharing common, though inverted, reproductive organs, were recast as members of inherently opposite sexes based upon scientific observation and assessment of their bodies (Laqueur 1990, pp.149–81).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the proponents of a host of empirical projects including phrenology, physiognomy and craniometry, sought to rank the human population according to observable and quantifiable differences. Informing their investigations was a belief that "the surface of the body, and especially the face and head, bore the outward signs of inner character" (Sekula 1989, p.347). The inherent bodily signs of sex, race and class differences were searched for, and not surprisingly, found. Also brought into view were the supposedly tell-tale physical signs of moral virtue, mental capacity and criminality. Photography, hailed as a technology capable of capturing the real, was to be eagerly deployed in this search for difference and inferiority. As Sekula has noted, "photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*, to define both the *generalised look* – the typology – and the *contingent instance* of deviance and social pathology" (p.345).

While the photographic portraits of the upper and middle classes were accepted as visibly testifying to respectability, other photographs such as those of the poor, ill, black and criminal were accepted as proof of inherent unworthiness. The suggestion that a body, and in turn a photograph, could reveal an individual's inherent inadequacy or abnormality, underpinned one of the most curious photographic practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Composite photography was the invention of Francis Galton. A cousin of Charles Darwin, Galton is best remembered as the statistician who founded the eugenics movement. The composite photograph was his attempt to fuse statistical certainty with the evidence of the visual. By registering and exposing multiple portraits of the members of a selected class of people onto a single plate, Galton produced an image of a single face which he believed revealed the characteristics common to that class. Anything from 100 to 300 individual portraits would be combined in this way. According to Galton, the blurriness which commonly obscured the outline of the final image, indicated the degree of variation existing within the selected class. Galton's subjects in this novel process ranged from the worthy to the mundane and the worthless. Members of the Royal Engineers and of families, the physically diseased and the criminal, were among those he selected as subjects. In Galton's view, the composite photograph of 24 members of the Royal Engineers offered "a clue [as] to the direction in which the stock of the English race might most easily be improved". The composite spectacle of criminals, however, was to his mind, far less edifying:

> *The individual faces are villainous enough, but they are villainous in different ways, and when they are combined, the individual peculiarities disappear, and the common humanity of a low type is all that is left* (Quoted in Sekula 1989, pp.369–70).

Paradoxically, Galton's composite process obscured the very individuality that photography was claimed to capture. Nevertheless, his invention was not out of step with a framework of knowledge which emphasised sameness within particular groups of people, and at the same time, pointed to supposedly inherent differences between these groups. By the late nineteenth century, the urge to observe, measure, quantify and categorise people had been given renewed impetus and scientific credibility via the social application of Darwin's theory of natural selection. In the emerging field of criminal anthropology, empiricism and Social Darwinism converged to produce a portrait of the true criminal as an evolutionary throwback whose abnormality was both inborn and visible. According to Cesare Lombroso, hailed as the father of criminology, criminals were distinguishable by their apish features: a thick skull, a large jaw, the preeminence of the face over the cranium, relatively long arms, precocious wrinkles, a low and narrow forehead, large ears, an absence of baldness, darker skin and so on (Gould 1981, p.129). By the 1890s, a profusion of such descriptions was appearing in print and, more often than not, accompanied and supported by the use of photographs. Even Galton's curious composites were offered "as the image of scientific proof" (Sekula 1989, p.363). Used as evidence by practitioners in a range of newly established social sciences, and incorporated into the record-keeping systems of state agencies and institutions, photography had become instrumental to the emerging disciplinary apparatuses of the industrialised world. As John Tagg (1988) has noted:

> *The emergence of photographic documentation and … the photograph's "evidential force" were bound up with new discursive and institutional forms, subject to but also exercising real effects of power, and developing in a complex historical process that is all but obliterated by the idea of a continuous "documentary tradition" which takes the status of photographic evidence as neutral and given* (pp.7–8).

Revisioning the young

Age too was to become constituted as a significant difference between people. Its increasing importance can be discerned in visual representations of the young produced over the centuries. In tracing the history of childhood, Philipe Aries's (1962) starting point lay in the difference between medieval depictions of children as miniature adults and contemporary photographic images of children of all ages. This gradual yet dramatic shift in the visual representation of children had little to do with technological advances or the bodily development of humans. The fact that children were at one time represented, and indeed seen as adult-like, merely reflected a broader framework of knowledge in which age was not recognised as a primary constituent of difference. By the late nineteenth century, however, childhood had come to be defined as a discrete and special stage of life, and with it, the child had been recast as the antithesis of the adult. Innocence, naivety, vulnerability, naturalness, simplicity and dependence were denoted as characterising children and childhood. In contrast, complexity, responsibility, knowledge and depravity had come to be associated with adult life (Bessant 1991). The "discovery of childhood" as Aries has called it, was to be followed by a further differentiation between childhood and adolescence. By the early twentieth century, the teenage years had begun to be defined as a particularly precarious transitional period. Adolescence was increasingly characterised as a time of confusion and conflict, one in which the simplicity of childhood was constantly challenged and eventually displaced by the expectations and demands of adulthood.

This conceptual division of life into discrete, numerically quantifiable stages both reflected and informed changes in social organisation and everyday practice. As industrialisation had advanced, a distinction had gradually been drawn between the public and private. In the public sphere, at least, the need for the labour of women and children had diminished. The extended family, which in pre-industrial times had functioned primarily as an integrated work unit, had slowly given way to a smaller family which was domestically orientated and child-centred. It was within this new family structure that, in the first instance, children were to be protected, nurtured and guided in what was increasingly perceived as a perilous journey towards adulthood. A host of social, legal and institutional developments also emphasised the uniqueness of the young and operated to ensure their physical segregation, appropriate supervision and training. The philanthropic and religious endeavours of the "child saving" movement were formalised in the development of government agencies and institutions which dealt with children legally defined as "neglected" and "criminal". The use of child labour in industrial workplaces declined and was eventually outlawed, replaced instead by the legal requirement that children be formally educated. Schools, children's courts, reformatories, and later, kindergartens and infant welfare centres were among those institutions which emerged to cater specifically for the young. Attached to these were also new professionals. Versed in the developing fields of education, medicine, criminology, sociology and psychology, these experts advised, supervised, and if necessary, intervened, to ensure the well-being of the young. Such developments reflected and reinforced the notion that the nature and requirements of the young were fundamentally different from those of adults, and moreover, played a crucial role in constructing childhood as a prolonged and *lived* experience.

By the mid-nineteenth century, in Australia as elsewhere, the line drawings and cartoons which appeared in the popular press, had begun to attest to the significance of age. These images encapsulated developing ideas about the young, and more broadly, served as an important means of constructing and transmitting social norms. A cartoon which appeared in *Melbourne Punch* in 1862 suggested the potential of the child as would-be law-abiding citizen, and yet to the modern eye, the figure of the child appears strangely ambiguous. Titled 'A Hard Lesson', the cartoon depicts a young boy with an unusually mature face, being instructed by Irish-born Gavin Duffy as to how violence might be put to revolutionary purposes. The child, named Young Australia, responds purposefully, "No! I Can't. I Shan't & I Won't" (Inglis 1981, pp.5–6). By the mid-1880s, this transitional figure which metaphorically represented the development of a people and their country, was to be rivalled by a more child-like image, that of the "little boy from Manly". The inspiration for this image was a patriotic letter bearing the name of ten-year-old Ernest Laurence from Manly, which was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1885. Less than a month after the letter's publication, the little boy had made his debut in a cartoon entitled 'Innocent Triflers'. Bearing the body and face of a child, he is shown putting a penny into a box labelled 'Patriotic Fund' (Inglis 1981, pp.9–19). Thirty years later, a *Bulletin* cartoon featured a framed portrait of the little boy from Manly gracing the wall of a suburban home. Standing looking at it, is a young man. Dressed in Australian military uniform, with one arm in a sling and the other holding a rifle, he has just returned from Gallipoli. As had been hoped, the little boy from Manly had grown up to be a noble, brave and generous man (Inglis 1981, pp.9 & 20).

As the twentieth century progressed, more detailed illustrations and photographs began to be incorporated into newspapers and magazines. While the obviously metaphorical nature of many earlier depictions gave way to images which were claimed to more accurately reflect the real, these new representations still served a normative function. The hand-drawn depictions of ideal and sometimes imagined children were simply displaced by images of real children who were presented as no less ideal. The young princes and princesses of the British Royal Family, the child stars of Hollywood, the winners of local baby shows along with budding sports champions, became staples for popular consumption. Their images attested to the innocence, beauty and potential of the perfect child, and moreover, served to illustrate the benefits of sound heredity and proper parenting. Now conceived as unique and fragile beings, children were deemed to require special protection and attention if they were to be ideal children and later exemplary adults. Hard work and good intentions were no longer sufficient. Child-rearing had instead become a science, and motherhood, a profession. The popular press and, in particular, women's magazines, played an important role in this, providing a forum for the dissemination of expert knowledge about children and child-rearing. Amply supported by visual images, these articles and problem pages, expert columns and advertisements, enthusiastically advised readers as to the latest techniques and aids of assistance to them in their parental endeavours. A 1930s advertisement for *Sister Muriel Peck's Book for Mothers*, was not unusual in its instructiveness (Reproduced in Reiger 1985, p.150). Appearing below a photograph of a young boy holding a particularly round-faced baby were these cautioning words: "Children like us are not reared by Chance." According to the advertisement, Sister Peck's book was judged as splendid by Victoria's leading baby doctors and promised to meet "all mothers' difficulties". A free weight chart, which would allow mothers to check their baby's progress week by week, was promised to each purchaser.

The tireless quest for the ideal child was partly driven by concerns and claims that the innocence and promise of children might be corrupted by premature exposure to the adult world, or even more fundamentally, by the inherent inadequacies or incompetence of their parents. Throughout the nineteenth century, images of the unruly and dangerous child had emerged alongside more idealised depictions of the young. Wayward youth was most commonly represented by the street urchin, who was depicted in the popular press, accosting respectable pedestrians, tugging the beard of a vicar or stealing a police constable's hat. Such fictive images were given added force by reportage which increasingly distinguished juvenile from adult offenders, and more broadly, cast suspicion upon those young people who appeared to depart from the model of the ideal child. While larrikins and hooligans were to become the objects of moral panic, it is clear that their offence rarely lay in the commission of serious crimes. More often it was their visible contravention of emerging norms governing the young which led to their identification as wayward and dangerous. Among the most frequently cited indiscretions of the young were the occupation of public space, freedom from adult supervision, the wearing of distinctive attire, physical aggressiveness on the part of boys, and sexual adventurism on the part of girls. Perceived as acting independently and in ways inappropriate for their age, these young people were depicted as antithetical to the innocent young and therefore rendered subject to greater scrutiny and control.

By the late nineteenth century, experts who had sought to explain the difference and aberrance of some adults, had begun to turn their attention specifically to the young. Darwin's theory of recapitulation, which had previously been employed by craniometrists and phrenelogists, was used by criminologists and psychologists as a framework for reinterpreting human development. The life course of an individual was likened to the evolution of the entire species. Thus the passage from childhood to adulthood was recast as a progression from primitiveness to civilisation. It was Lombroso's conviction that those "germs of moral insanity and criminality ... found normally in mankind in the first stages of his existence" and "considered monstrous when exhibited in adults ... frequently exist[ed] in the foetus" (Lombroso 1911, p.130). Within this evolutionary schema, however, it is clear that not all individuals were considered equally placed. As Gould has noted, "recapitulation served as a general theory of biological determinism" (Gould 1981, p.115). The children of those already perceived as less civilised were commonly posited as inherently less advanced and therefore least capable of successful adaptation. The increased scrutiny of non-white and working-class children, which often culminated in forced removal from their families, was justified by a belief that proper training was needed to overcome their naturally negative propensities. The belief that some children would remain forever bound by pernicious heredity found its ultimate expression in the demands of the eugenics movements.

Emerging discourses about juvenile delinquency were characterised by a relentless focus upon the body as both a basis and indicator of criminality. While photography afforded comforting images of idealised children, it was also utilised in the search for the delinquent. Cyril Burt's 1925 book, *The Young Delinquent*, which was to set the parameters for later studies, included photographs "inserted to give the visualising reader some concrete picture of the cases that illustrat[ed] the text" (Burt 1955, ix). Although canvassing such factors as familial upbringing, environment, intelligence and temperament, Burt's study was underpinned by a constant insistence upon the importance of heredity. Starting with the hypothesis "that crime is inherited or at least inborn", Burt concluded that although the physique of delinquent children "exhibit[ed] no qualitative differences", it was "upon average, inferior to that of the non-delinquent at every year of life" (pp.29 & 209). In succeeding decades, increasingly elaborate means for measuring, categorising and representing the supposedly inherent abnormality of delinquent children were developed. In his 1932 book, *Constitution-Types in Delinquency*, W.A. Willemse used photographs as evidence of the distinctive and abnormal physical types found within a South African reformatory for boys. These photographs were the product of a carefully managed process. After being measured and described anthropometrically, the boys were photographed from the front and side while standing in posed position. In order to expose their bodies as clearly as possible, and yet avoid resentment, the subjects were provided with bathing briefs to wear; a Bantu boy who appears photographed naked is a notable exception. According to Willemse, photographs were "a very essential feature" of his investigation and it was only through careful scrutiny of them that particular constitutional peculiarities were detected (Willemse 1932, p.28). But it was not merely these highly stylised photographs which were important. The process of photographing had, of itself, become valued as a means of exposing the biologically-based psychology of the subject. For Willemse, the response of one boy who would only agree to be photographed alone, "fit[ted] in splendidly with the reserved sensitivity of the Leptosome" (Willemse 1932, p.23).

Such use of photography reached its fullest expression in the work of American William Sheldon. Sheldon (1970) conceived the process of photographing the delinquent as a "standardised test situation". He emphasised that every effort should be made to bring the delinquent into "perfect conformity" with predetermined criteria (p.348). His subjects, made to pose naked, were photographed from three different angles. In a series of books published between 1936 and 1974, Sheldon differentiated between three distinct body types: the soft and round endomorph, the hard and muscular mesamorph, and the fragile and thin ectomorph (p.348). Linked to each of these, he argued, was a specific temperament. Based upon a study of 200 "troubled youths" referred to an institution for professional supervision, Sheldon concluded that mesamorphs predominated among the ranks of the delinquent (Sheldon 1949). Even if one accepts these carefully constructed photographs as accurate, it is clear that in attributing criminality directly to body type and to an associated temperament, Sheldon excluded from consideration other factors which might have explained his results. It is conceivable, for example, that working-class children who were already those most prone to state surveillance and intervention, were also by virtue of their diet and lifestyle, more likely to conform to the bodily specifications of the mesamorph (Taylor et al. 1973, p.43). Even more conceivable, however, is the possibility that greatest scrutiny and control was directed towards those children who were muscular and strong in physique, and assertive and independent in temperament. These characteristics, the defining traits of the mesamorph, directly conflicted with conceptions of the normal child as physically weak and dependant. In both photograph and text, the construction of the innocent normal child was thus parallelled by the construction of its antithesis, the dangerous and abnormal child. In turn, these constructions reflected and reinforced the new and fragile boundary between child and adult.

A picture paints a thousand words

The exploits of Lombroso, Galton, Sheldon and the like might seem somewhat curious and distant to readers of newspapers today. However, the fundamental orientation of their theories and, in particular, their relentless focus upon the body, continues to inform modern representations and understandings of youth, evil and innocence. The photographic and textual representations of Robert Thompson and James Bulger provide just one example of how these discourses, now normalised and popularised in the media, implore readers to see the inherent normality and goodness of some children and the fundamental abnormality and dangerousness of others.

No coverage of the Bulger case was complete without photographs, and yet what purpose did they serve? Roland Barthes (1957, p.28) once mused that the production and reading of photographs is most often characterised by *studium*. That is, they accord with and can be read within the culturally and historically specific knowledges of the photographer and the viewer. Barthes described studium as a "kind of education" in civility, knowledge and politeness. It is studium, he suggested, which characterises mundane and unremarkable photographs. The family snapshot of James Bolger, like the school photograph of Robert Thompson, might well be understood as examples of studium. They afford us with normative and easily comprehendible images of the child as laughing toddler and well-behaved student. Barthes suggested, however, that photographs are sometimes distinguished by an element which disrupts or defies studium. *Punctum*, as he called this disruptive quality, might appear as a simple detail in a photograph, as a polished boot on the foot of an otherwise raggedly dressed child, for example (pp.42–3). Or it might be constituted by an apparent defiance of time. Barthes was indeed captivated by an attractive portrait of a handsome young man, the studium of which was broken for him by the knowledge that this attempted assassin, having been photographed while awaiting execution, was already dead and yet was going to die (pp.94–97). While Barthes emphasised how this photograph eluded time, it is clear that his reading of it, was also informed by his knowledge of surrounding and subsequent events. In a similar way, the sheer ordinariness of the photographs of Robert Thomson and James Bulger, is interrupted and undermined by the knowledge of a larger story. Knowledge, which importantly, is framed and detailed at length in the accompanying text.

Barthes understood the *studium* as always coded and the *punctum* as uncoded (p.51). With this, however, I must disagree. While the photographs of James Bulger and Robert Thompson clearly comply with conceptions of the normal child, the story which disturbs these images is also coded, albeit by a related yet oppositional discourse which emphasises abnormality. Ultimately, it is only in relation to the aberrant child, that the ideal child can be defined. The photograph of Thompson, imbued with new meanings by the text, serves as a warning of the child gone wrong, or even more fundamentally, as a representation of a child that was always wrong. The fact that Thompson's aberrance cannot be seen makes it all the more disturbing and is only overcome by the suggestion that a disjunction exists between his appearance and being. Thompson and Venables "*appear* to be children but are not: they are more like evil adults or monsters in disguise" (Young 1996, p.115). In much the same way, the ordinariness of the childhood photographs of Port Arthur gunman Martin Bryant has been undercut by press coverage which has attributed to him a "bizarre life" and character (*Who Weekly*, 13 May 1996). In this case too, there has been a constant assertion of Bryant's difference; one which has been made all the more forceful by the constant contrasts drawn between him and his alleged victims, particularly the young. *The Age* chose the words "Young, rich and wild" to describe Bryant in a banner headline (*Age*, 30 April 1996). He was 28 years old. Thompson and Venables were only ten at the time of their offence. It seems that despite its construction and rigidification over several centuries, the concept of youth, remains oddly fragile and pliable. Perhaps this is because the categories we have constructed can never account for the diversity and complexity of people, nor adequately explain the evil that they sometimes do.

Young people and social order: Depictions and reactions

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Richard Hil

Waves, epidemics and racial war

The construction of a "black juvenile crime problem" in Queensland

MORAL PANICS over juvenile crime are a recurrent feature of most liberal democratic states (Cohen 1980). At such times politicians, community leaders, police commissioners, criminal justice practitioners and a host of "experts" embark on a search for solutions to the "crime problem". In representing the "problem" in terms of a natural disaster or epidemic, juvenile crime assumes an apocalyptic presence that threatens to engulf the law-abiding majority (Young 1996). Whether or not such alarm can be justified in terms of the available criminal statistics is less important than the perception of increasing threat to the social body. As Rob Sindall (1990) observes in relation to "street robberies" committed by the "criminal classes" in nineteenth century Victorian England:

> *Whether such events actually happened is not of central importance ... and is a fact which will forever remain unknown. What is important is that the middle classes believed they actually happened and that the consequences of this belief led to changes in the control structure of their society* (p.1).

Moral panic and black crime

More recent outbreaks of moral panic have occurred alongside the emergence of working-class youth subcultures, including teds, mods and rockers, skinheads, punks, bodgies, widgies and so forth. The resulting hysteria over crime and delinquency and the perceived threat to social order have led to a number of far-reaching changes in crime control cultures.

The most significant moral panic to have surfaced in recent years in England and the United States related to the street crime of "mugging". During the 1970s muggings were associated by many politicians and the media with Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American youth in the badlands of the inner-city. Mugging was viewed as symptomatic of a general crisis in social order in which growing numbers of disaffected and marginalised sections of the "underclass" (particularly black youth) threatened to overwhelm a beleaguered, law-abiding citizenry (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts 1978).

The moral panic over mugging originated in the context of a society experiencing deep and prolonged economic crisis. Against this background, the crimes of black youth came to signify the most vivid and alarming example of the consequences of mass youth unemployment. For the liberal state, besieged by economic and social problems, mugging provided the pretext for increased social control and the imposition of a range of disciplinary measures in "problem areas" (Hall et al. 1978).

During the 1970s and 1980s Australia experienced an economic crisis of similar proportions to that of other Western industrialised states. High levels of structural unemployment (particularly youth unemployment) coupled with growing poverty and deprivation characterised the economic and social landscape. It was during this period that various moral panics over juvenile crime in Australia emerged (White 1990). Juvenile crime was perceived more and more as *the* major social problem confronting state and territory governments across Australia.

Yet while "marginalised working-class youth" were perceived by the media as a major threat to social order, it was Aboriginal youth in particular who came to signify the most immediate and potent danger (Beresford & Omaji 1996). As Chris Cunneen (1994, p.152) points out: "An important part of the discourse on law and order has been the racist doctrine which identifies Aboriginal people as the cause of the "crime problem". The link between black people and crime led to the emergence of a range of more coercive responses by the state to the presence of young Aboriginal people in public places (Kitchener 1992).

The representation of Aboriginal youth as a threat to social stability has occurred at the same time as the Queensland State Government, along with other governments, has sanctioned a number of reactive measures to deal with the "growing problem" of juvenile crime. These include more punitive approaches to sentencing (as evidenced in the 1992 Juvenile Justice Act), an increase in police powers (for example, in regulating the presence of young people in Brisbane's Southbank complex) and support for localised initiatives such as curfews (Simpson & Simpson 1993). Right-wing politicians have also called for more draconian measures such as the enforced exclusion of Aboriginal people from certain areas (for example, on the Gold Coast) and the re-introduction of public floggings and other ritualised humiliations for juvenile offenders.

Manufacturing news

It is against the background of economic decline and changes to the crime control culture that the moral panic over Aboriginal juvenile crime, and the response to it, needs to be understood. A key player in this regard is the media. Newspaper, television and radio reports not only define and construct "news" within the journalistic parameter of "newsworthiness", but news itself generates a symbiotic effect in which news feeds upon itself, thereby creating a spiral of even more news (Windschuttle 1988).

The process of sensitising the public to social problems involves the exaggeration and distortion of selected events that eventually magnify the problem out of proportion to its original character (Chibnall 1977). For example, over recent years juvenile crime has been represented by the media in terms of threat, disorder and lawlessness, often without any reference to "supporting evidence". The sustained focus on the crimes of Aboriginal youth, has further served to represent this group *above all others* as primarily responsible for the growth of juvenile crime. Moreover, the repeated emphasis on particular crimes ("street crimes", taking and driving away) in certain places ("high crime areas", "high profile areas", "trouble spots", "crime zones", "crime hot spots") draws attention to the activities of young people in particular situational zones. As a result, certain areas and clusters of people (most notably, black youth) come to signify the essential character of the "crime problem".

This chapter examines the way in which juvenile crime in Ayr – a small rural community in North Queensland – has come to symbolise the apparent slide into "lawlessness", supposedly brought about by the conduct of "lawless" black youth. Between late 1992 and 1994, events in Ayr attracted local and national media attention. The "crime problem" in the locality was constructed in terms of the actions of a few "out of control" black teenagers or, more dramatically, as the harbinger of full-scale social disorder and racial war.

Background

Major concerns over juvenile crime in Ayr emerged in late 1992. At that time the behaviour of a Pacific family, made up of parents and 12 children, began to attract the attentions of the local media. Despite evidence of a moderate level of petty offending among both white and black youth in the area (amounting to less than 40 court appearances per year between 1993 and 1995), media attention focused increasingly on the activities of this family. Certainly, the family was known to social welfare organisations and to the local police, as were a number of other "problem families" in the town. That the children in the family were troublesome and committed offences is undoubtedly true. Yet for a number of complex reasons, this family and the actions of black youth in general came to represent the sum total of all crime in the region.

In order to examine the way in which the "juvenile crime problem" in Ayr became synonymous with black youth, it is necessary to focus in some detail on reports contained in local newspapers over a period of nine months, from June 1993 to March 1994. In charting the course of these reports reference is made to the three major stages of a moral panic, as outlined by Stan Cohen (1980, pp.27–48) in his seminal work on mods and rockers in England. These stages include: exaggeration and distortion, prediction and symbolisation.

Exaggeration and distortion

The major form of distortion in the reporting of the Ayr situation was the tendency of the print media to exaggerate the nature and extent of crime committed by black youth, and to represent such events as symptomatic of a more general juvenile crime problem. In outlining the process of exaggeration and distortion evident in Ayr, a number of recurrent themes in news reports are addressed. These include references to crime waves, lawlessness and youth gangs, threats to community survival and the apparent symbiotic connection between black youth and rising juvenile crime.

Crime waves: References to juvenile crime in Ayr in terms of "rising tides" and "crime waves" helps to generate the impression of a community about to be overwhelmed. According to one report, the community is " ... powerless in the face of a rising tide of crime" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 5 June 1993). The report notes that the Ayr community has lost "control" over juvenile crime and that attempts to form "vigilante groups" would not help the situation. The image of "out of control" juveniles is further enhanced by references to widespread drunkenness among young people. For example, a report headlined 'Booze Blamed for Brawls' (*Townsville Bulletin*, 12 October 1993) states that teenagers in Ayr are being sold alcohol "by the bucketful". A witness is quoted as saying:

> *The kids are getting smashed out of their brains and then spilling out on to the streets in the early hours of the morning, where they are totally out of control.*

Another witness stated, "The kids come out of the pubs full of grog or marijuana and just go berserk" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 12 October 1993). A further report headlined 'Continuing Crime Wave Plagues Ayr' points to "a spate of break and enters in Ayr". The report continued:

> *Businesses, clubs, schools and private residences were all targeted by vandals ... Two Aboriginal or Islander youths were seen leaving the front door of Joyce and Scuderi Pharmacy at 4.05 am Tuesday. The youths were aged between 14 and 17 and appeared to have their pockets full of money ... $30 in petty cash was stolen* (*Advocate*, 27 October 1993).

Lawlessness and youth gangs: The "crime wave" is now linked to juveniles who are seen as indulging in (uncontrolled) "lawless behaviour". An editorial castigated those theorists who propose that juvenile crime resulted from boredom as "... symptomatic of the fuzzy thinking which has created the climate of lawlessness in Ayr today" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 5 June 1993). Other reports, however, cited unemployment, little or no money, alcohol and lack of respect for both people and property as contributing factors. These factors constituted "a recipe for trouble" (*Advocate*, 20 October 1993). Whatever the perceived origins of juvenile offending in Ayr might be (and theories about this varied from one newspaper to another), the escalation of crime, according to a local politician, threatened "... to destroy the social fabric of Queensland" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 4 February 1994).

Lawlessness and juvenile crime are further linked through repeated references to the apparent presence of "youth gangs". Under the graphic headline 'Youth Gangs Terror', a police spokesperson is quoted as saying that "... Queensland is in the grip of a spreading reign of terror carried out by rampaging gangs of mainly Aboriginal youths". The situation is described as "close to urban terrorism" where "no community is safe" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 4 February 1994).

Threat to community survival: The connections between lawlessness, juvenile offending and growing violence are evidenced in a story headlined 'Death fears from ongoing attacks' in which a mother is reported to ask: "how long it will be before someone gets killed?" (*Advocate*, 13 October 1993). The perceived threat to the safety of citizens is evident in reports dealing with proposals for various community defence measures. Such measures are considered in the light of the juvenile justice system (courts, police and so forth) having failed to protect people and property in Ayr. The threat to local order is considered to emerge from teenagers and particularly from black teenagers. Media reports regard the culprits as "... a gang of black youths who have no respect for authority" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 20 November 1993) and as "... a group of young people ... mostly of black parentage ... who have behaved in such a manner that many citizens fear for their safety" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 8 February 1994).

Juvenile crime and black youth: Having targeted black youth, media reports proceed to sensationalise and exaggerate their behaviour. One report states, "... it appeared residents of Ayr were quick to blame Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for street offences and crimes". The same story goes on to state that " ... a gang of young black girls ... [went] ... on a rampage" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 17 November 1993). Another report asserts that juvenile crime in Ayr is committed almost exclusively by black youth: "The core problem is centred on a handful of black youths and the whole community knows it" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 20 November 1993). A further report states that Burdekin residents have had enough of being "... attacked by groups of young people – who then brazenly turn around and threaten charges of racial discrimination if others show any intention of retaliation" (*Advocate*, 19 November 1993).

The assertion that "everyone knows" that black youth are responsible for the majority of crimes in the Ayr district is linked to a broader claim that black crime is a threat to the entire State: "From Cunnamulla to Cairns, from Brisbane to the Burdekin, these thugs ... mainly Aboriginal youths ... are ruining people's lives" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 4 February 1994).

An Opposition spokesperson on police matters further states that "... no doubt many of the offending children had been inspired by extremist statements from radical Aboriginal leaders" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 4 February 1994). Thus, the links between the dominant themes of rampaging gangs, black youth and juvenile crime (and, not least, the shadowy presence of "radical Aboriginal leaders") are made explicit.

Later press reports, apparently based on pronouncements of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, take the scenario of threat one major step further. Now the spectre haunting the local community is that juvenile (black) crime may lead to full-scale "racial war". This chilling vision is reflected in the following advice from Ayr's National Party member: "... rein in teenage terrorists or stand responsible for tragic events in Ayr." An article in the *Townsville Bulletin* on 8 February 1994 headed 'Goss asked to prevent racial war' depicts a community living in abject fear:

> *Black leaders don't want the white flag waving of the Goss government ... [but] an immediate and practical approach to the problem confronting the whole community in Ayr. If this does not happen they are afraid the community will be torn apart by some tragic event.*

Prediction

The militaristic imagery of armed conflict contained in references to "racial war", "teenage terrorists" and so forth illustrates the way in which news reports, in apocalyptic terms represented events in Ayr. The reference to the possibility of warfare being waged between white and black residents on the streets of Ayr was perhaps the most dramatic and graphic representation of a (black) crime problem becoming "out of control".

Apocalyptic forecasts of crime waves and the possibility of racial war led to a search for new ameliorative measures in order to deal with juvenile crime in the Burdekin and wider area. Pressure emerges from various quarters to introduce tougher sanctions to combat the escalating "juvenile crime problem".

In a seemingly conciliatory report in the *Advocate* on 19 November 1993 the paper responds to assertions of growing divisions between black and white people in Ayr as follows: "... there is no division between responsible citizens in the Burdekin, regardless of colour, in recognising who the mischief-makers are, and what should be done to solve the problem." The report goes on to quote a local member of parliament as saying:

> *A similar situation was faced a number of years ago, and the matter was quickly, quietly and painlessly resolved by taking the people involved out of circulation for a period into appropriate and still existing facilities.*

The proposal to remove "mischief-makers" from the locality is regarded as one of a number of measures aimed at restoring order; others include the creation of vigilante groups, curfews, tougher penalties and increased policing.

Vigilante groups and curfews: A story headed 'Vigilante fears rise as crime escalates' comments on the mounting pressure on civic leaders to form vigilante groups in order " ... to deal with persistent juvenile crime, hooliganism and anti-social behaviour" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 4 June 1993). In the wake of concerns over "escalating crime" and fears of "racial war" a Council of Aboriginal Elders in Ayr was established in order to oversee the enforcement of a curfew on local black juveniles. An editorial entitled "High Stakes in Crime Battle" reports that local elders have gained police support "... to enforce a curfew requiring black children aged up to 12 years old to be off the streets by 11 pm and those under 16 by midnight." According to one editorial, the elders "will patrol the streets of Ayr using, with police sanction, *whatever force is necessary* to get the children off the streets" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 10 September 1993. Author's italics).

Calls for tougher penalties: Along with curfews and vigilante groups, come calls for tougher penalties to deal with the local "crime problem". A report in the *Townsville Bulletin* (2 September 1993) headed 'Juvenile offenders answer to elders' outlines the provisions of the new Juvenile Justice Act. Another report refers to a petition containing 1,839 signatures presented by Ayr residents to Premier Wayne Goss which offers support for tougher sentencing options and increased police powers (*Advocate*, 8 October 1993).

According to the media, tougher penalties should reflect the feelings of the community. Thus: " ... if the defendants are found guilty, their punishment should reflect the anger of the community against which these crimes are being committed" (*Advocate*, 14 January 1994). Calls to increase police numbers are supported by reports that "... the community might be left without a police service during the day in order to have more officers on night duty" (*Advocate*, 27 October 1993).

A plea to implement such measures was made at a community meeting of Ayr residents in late October 1993. Commenting on the petition, a report in a local Ayr paper called for "pressure" to be applied to the government to "change the laws" in respect of juvenile crime management. There was also "... the need for parents to take more responsibility for their children" (*Advocate*, 27 October 1993).

Crackdowns: Calls for increased penalties, tough law-and-order measures, more police officers on the street and so forth are collectively referred to under the euphemism "crackdown". The crackdown was aimed at concentrating increased numbers of police officers in certain places at designated times. Such measures lasted for about six weeks (mid-November to late December 1993) and concentrated mainly on the prevention of burglaries in the area. This resulted in an increase in charges laid against both juvenile and adult offenders. It was reported that 29 people were charged or cautioned and that the age of offenders "... ranged between 12 and 28 years. Eleven were adults. One juvenile faces 41 charges" (*Advocate*, 31 December 1993). The same paper later celebrated the results of the police initiative in the following terms: "... a six-week blitz which began in the district last December has resulted in "hundreds of charges being laid" (*Advocate*, 23 February 1994). In addition to the police "blitz", other measures were proposed to tackle juvenile crime, including the appointment of an Aboriginal youth worker and regular visits to the families of offenders by officers from the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs.

Symbolisation

The construction of a (black) "juvenile crime problem" in Ayr symbolises a view of that community as "a crime hot spot" (*Advocate*, 14 January 1994). Ayr comes to represent the "thin end of the wedge" in terms of the growth of black juvenile crime throughout Queensland. What was earlier viewed as a local problem now becomes a vivid example of an encroaching epidemic. Talk of crime hot spots, lawlessness, crime waves and so forth serve to represent Ayr as the symbolic capital of black juvenile crime in North Queensland. For example, as one paper observed: "Juvenile crime has become a serious problem in Ayr and elsewhere and street violence is an increasingly worrying feature of all north Queensland towns and cities" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 9 February 1994).

Ironically, the media itself (the very architects of the "problem") express concerns over the unwelcome focus on the local community: "Lawlessness among the Burdekin's young people has once again brought the spotlight of unfavourable publicity on our district" (*Advocate*, 20 October 1993). Yet it is not sufficient to generalise the "problem". It must be particularised to a section of the local black rather than white youth population. The "fact" that black juveniles are deemed as primarily responsible for crime in the locality is apparently beyond dispute. For example, one report gives prominent coverage to the views of a local politician who states that: "The core problem is centred on a handful of black youths and the whole community knows it" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 20 November 1993):

However, despite the tendency of local papers to symbolise local events as symptomatic of a larger problem, solutions are directed towards curtailing the activities of one black family in the area. A report refers to an Ayr household "… waging a one-family war against the community". The same report cites a leaked document which blames members of the family for up to 300 offences, and that "… the town was living in fear of the children". Community support was necessary "… to stop a family of 14 children from destroying the town" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 14 January 1994). Another report states that the family "… have been blamed for up to 70% of the break and enters and assaults in the community in the past few years" (*Advocate*, 26 January 1994).

Reaction

The intense media focus on the conduct of a single black family in Ayr results in a number of local reactions. For example, the headline 'Town vents fury on family' serves to further reduce the problem of juvenile crime to a single Aboriginal family. Interestingly, members of the family have since responded to media reports by claiming they have "… been threatened and their children have become scapegoats for criminals in the Burdekin area" (*Advocate*, 26 January 1994). Moreover, a police spokesperson is reported as saying that there have been "… threats to burn the family's house down and bottles had been thrown through windows in the middle of the night" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 31 January 1994).

In defence of the family, a spokesperson for the Aboriginal and Islander Legal Aid Service states:

> *The community should be aware that there is more than one family committing crimes in Ayr … [and] … there are other kids involved in a lot of issues in this community and nothing is said or done about it* (*Advocate*, 16 March 1994).

A story in the *Townsville Bulletin* on 11 March 1994 condemns the Brisbane-based *Sunday Mail* for publishing an article containing photographs of the family. The chairperson of an Aboriginal community meeting in Townsville is reported as saying:

> *What the meeting most disagreed with was the article's vilification of the entire family as well as the Murri community in general and, in particular, the publishing of pictures and names of juveniles whose guilt or innocence is still a matter for the courts.*

Conclusion

In examining news reports on the "juvenile crime problem" in Ayr attention has been drawn to a number of connections between the symbolic representation of that community as "a crime hot spot" and the actions of black youth. The "problem" is regarded not simply as a "local" issue but as indicative of a more general phenomenon: namely, the growth of juvenile *black* crime throughout Queensland. Ultimately, analytical divisions between local, state and national crime levels are obscured by the tendency of the print media to regard *all* juvenile crime as synonymous with endemic black crime in Queensland and elsewhere.

This process of "selecting out" and particularising the crimes of the less powerful is not new. In recent years moral panics over juvenile crime in the UK, the USA and Australia have been typified by a focus on the "crime problem" as essentially a "black problem". In accounting for this phenomenon in Australia it is necessary to locate the analysis of public discourses within the context of a society that has both historically oppressed indigenous people (Cunneen 1994, p.153). The combined effects of dispossession, the foreclosure of economic and social opportunities and the over-policing of Aboriginal people has led directly to the over-representation of this group in the Australian criminal justice system. Such over-representation helps to sustain the *impression* that Aboriginal people commit a vast majority of criminal offences. This proposition cannot be supported by the available evidence.

As the above analysis of news reportage in Ayr indicates, the media played a central role in constructing particular impressions of criminal misconduct by black youth in that community. These impressions were projected onto a broader and altogether more threatening picture of black juvenile crime spreading inexorably across the length and breadth of Queensland. Juvenile crime was thus represented as indicative of a deeper and more widespread problem of black juvenile crime throughout the state. In Ayr the "juvenile crime problem" was equated by the print media with the actions of a single (Pacific) family. The family as a whole (and not just the offending members within it) were held responsible for the slide into "lawlessness" in the local community. The fact that offences were being committed around the same time by white juveniles seemed to have escaped the notice of local journalists. As the news reports gathered momentum the processes of exaggeration and distortion took over to the point that black juvenile crime and racial war were about to engulf the whole town. It was time, therefore, to take "tough" and resolute action – something had to be done.

Anthony McMahon

Rough justice

Juveniles and the reporting of crime in Townsville

THE *TOWNSVILLE BULLETIN* of 27 August 1996 reported on its front page that a 16-year-old Aboriginal girl was shot by a pellet from an air-rifle while walking with friends along a city street.

> *Eva was walking along Bamford Lane, Kirwan, with friends and relations just after midnight Saturday when a car with two men inside drove past. "The first time they drove past they yelled out, 'nigger', she said. Then they went down to the roundabout and came back again. As they went past I heard a crack – like a branch breaking – and felt a knock in the back of the head. I just thought I'd been hit in the head with a stick or something."*

In many ways this is an unremarkable incident; it may make page one of a country newspaper but it's not as important as most crimes reported in the media (the other main story in the *Townsville Bulletin* that day was the possible charging of the Queensland Police Minister and the Police Union president with electoral bribery). Yet Eva's story is front page news in Townsville at a time when indigenous people and young people on the streets and in public places have become the targets of political and community vituperation.

Townsville, through the law and order campaign of its Labor mayor in late 1995, has adopted an aggressive approach aimed at removing indigenous people from an inner-city park. Guard dogs, security personnel and officious harassment of the "park people" by local government employees had triggered "a community response that is largely intolerant and non-accepting of the circumstances of Aboriginal park dwellers" (Hale 1996, p.15).

A comparable campaign has been waged in the local print media over juvenile offending. Breaking and entering, stealing from the elderly, and the bashing by juveniles of an aged war hero have given the impetus for politicians, police, parents, academics and residents to propose causes of and solutions to juvenile crime in Townsville. This chapter analyses print media reporting of juvenile crime in Townsville during the first half of 1996.

Making news

Townsville is a coastal city in the "dry" tropics north Queensland. About 120,000 people live in Townsville and its nearby "twin city", Thuringowa. Townsville/Thuringowa have one local paper, the *Townsville Bulletin*, known as "The Bully", plus a number of free over-the-fence papers for residents. As in many country towns, juvenile crime, its prevention and control, are important topics in the local press.

Most juvenile crimes reported in the papers involved stealing (including shoplifting and car theft) and break and enter. The *Townsville Bulletin* (18 June 1996) reported that there were 290 break-ins by juveniles in April 1996 and 327 in May. There were few crimes of violence, although the bashing of a World War Two veteran around Anzac Day by two boys, aged eleven and 16 years, received saturation coverage in the media. In answer to a *Townsville Bulletin* reporter's query whether police "were quite capable of dealing with the city's crime wave", police reported that "car thefts involving joy-riding teenagers had dropped and few random bashings of schoolboys had been reported" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 25 April 1996).

The crimes juveniles actually commit, however, are almost irrelevant to the "debate" about juvenile offending. Juvenile offending, at least in the Townsville print media, has become a springboard for political aspirants and a soapbox for vigilantes with solutions that hark back to the supposed "good old days" when juveniles and indigenous peoples were kept quiet and out of sight. Certainly, the collectivisation of all young people into criminal gangs – with headlines such as 'Teen gang terror in West End' (*Townsville Sun*, 3 April 1996) and 'Teen gang's theft brazen' (*Independent News*, 15 May 1996) – serves to create an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and paranoia about young people in groups. As the Townsville Victim of Crime Association secretary said, "90% of juveniles not involved in criminal activities were now being victimised by the wider community, particularly groups of students seen as gangs" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 31 May 1996). Young people are seen as lawless, violent and uncontrolled and, thereby, a source of incredible frustration to many members of the Townsville/Thuringowa communities.

Getting away with it

Community members, State and local politicians, police and even juvenile detention centre workers quoted in Townsville newspapers seem persuaded that juvenile offenders are getting away with committing crimes, or if they are caught, are receiving only token sentences. Tapping into general community sentiment about leniency for juvenile offenders, the Queensland Attorney-General, Denver Beanland, promised that changes to the Juvenile Justice Act would ensure that "juveniles who commit serious and persistent crimes will no longer receive feather duster treatment" (*Townsville Sun*, 24 April 1996).

> *The old adage that crime does not pay no longer rings hollow these days. While it is true that our prisons are full of criminals, many lead a life of luxury at liberty compared with the day-to-day struggle of many honest Aussie battlers. Far too many criminals, particularly juveniles, get off scot free* (Editorial, *Townsville Bulletin*, 28 May 1996).

It's the notion that juveniles are not accountable for their offences that incenses newspaper reporters and writers of letters to the editor. State Labor Member of Parliament, Ken McElligott, attacked the police for not doing their job. "He (McElligott) said that he had been told repeatedly police officers were reluctant to investigate crimes involving Aborigines or juveniles" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 12 July 1996). McElligott repeated his accusation a week later:

> *One concern was that people were told repeatedly by police in response to calls that if the offender was indigenous or a juvenile, the police could not touch them* (*Townsville Bulletin*, 20 July 1996).

While police reiterate that the law applies to all and that "police prosecutions were determined on the availability of evidence, not the colour of a person's skin or the person's age"

(*Townsville Bulletin*, 20 July 1996), residents were not reassured. McElligott's comments echo the concerns of many residents interviewed in local papers. Even when the police did act, editorial writers, letter writers and those interviewed believed juveniles were treated too leniently. "Every caller criticised the juvenile justice system which they said protected young criminals" (*Townsville Sun*, 10 April 1996). One Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator, pictured in the paper with a club in his hand over a caption that read, "Neil McCarthy has no doubts what teenage gang members need," is reported as saying:

> *... a major reason behind people not calling police was a genuine concern that juvenile offenders would not be dealt with severely by the courts. "If the kids get a wrap (sic) over the knuckles they just come back and intimidate the family even more"* (*Independent News*, 20 March 1996).

It is not just victims of crime who feel this way. "Some police have also criticised the juvenile justice system. One policeman, who did not want to be named, said it was like a 'revolving door'. 'The most I've seen a juvenile offender get is a couple of months at Cleveland Youth Centre'" (*Townsville Sun*, 3 April 1996). The same newspaper, two weeks later, under a front page headline 'Juvenile crims cop it sweet' reported the similar views of two male workers at Cleveland Correctional Centre in Townsville.

> *The city's diehard juvenile criminals are sent to the Cleveland Correctional Centre where they are treated like kings, according to two workers at the centre ... once they did make it to Cleveland, instead of being punished for their crimes, they enjoyed privileges law-abiding youths would not receive in their own homes, they said* (*Townsville Sun*, 17 April 1996).

The ideas that juvenile offenders are rarely caught, that police are not that concerned about catching them, that even if they are apprehended courts give lenient sentences so that they return to torment people again, is accepted wisdom in the local print media. Juveniles join indigenous peoples in popular misconception as groups in Australian society who are not held to the same account as everyone else. What this misconception creates is an angry frustration that turns to violence against those "getting away with it".

More than a clip on the ear

Ways proposed to control juvenile offending – or is it really ways to control juveniles? – range from the bizarre to the frightening to the nostalgic. The most bizarre was not the letter writer who wanted to dip the appropriate limbs of offending children into indelible bright dye to mark them as offenders (*Townsville Sun*, 17 April 1996), nor the ever popular Singapore Solution of public canings, but the support by the mayor of Townsville for council-funded security dog patrols to keep juveniles off the streets. The organiser of the Townsville District Anti-Crime Group had proposed street dog patrols because, "If juveniles see dogs and security guards going wandering around they will get the message and back off". In giving the group's proposal his written support, Mayor Tony Mooney said,

> *It is my personal view that well-trained and properly managed dogs are a legitimate part of the security industry and I am prepared to support your submission to council* (*Townsville Bulletin*, 4 July 1996).

The mayor had already sanctioned guard dogs the previous month to control and intimidate homeless Aboriginal people in an inner-city park (*Townsville Bulletin*, 29 May 1996). After a storm of protest over this decision, the council rejected the further plan to fund security dogs against juveniles (*Townsville Bulletin*, 5 July 1996).

More frighteningly sinister was the violent solution proposed by vigilantes to get rid of an 11-year-old Aboriginal girl who was reported to be responsible for more than 100 thefts over a two-month period (*Townsville Sun*, 3 April 1996). One crime victim mentioned in the newspaper was approached separately by two men offering their services.

> *Mrs Morelli said that no sooner had the newspaper been delivered than a man visited to assure her that he and a group had the situation covered. "He said, 'We know how to get rid of her and we won't get caught'", she said. The next day she spoke to a second man who said he had dealt with inmates before and offered Mrs Morelli his services. "He said, 'I know how to get my foot under things if you want a hand'", she said … "I have no intention of taking up the offer. I am a practising Christian and would never entertain the idea of harming the girl. I only aim to remove her from society to stop her wrecking people's lives"* (*Townsville Sun*, 10 April 1996).

The proposed violence in this example was the most detailed newspaper account given of what could befall alleged juvenile offenders. However, a substratum of violence was often hinted at to threaten juveniles. Stating that the public no longer had faith in the police, Member of Parliament McElligott said that "members of the public argued they needed guns to protect themselves" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 20 July 1996). Other residents spoke of vigilantes and "a bloodbath" (*Townsville Sun*, 3 April 1996) or of unspecified "action" (*Townsville Sun*, 24 April 1996). While police (*Townsville Bulletin*, 25 April 1996) and other commentators (*The Express*, 6 August 1996) noted that most juvenile violence was against other juveniles, residents were not reassured. One elderly resident had armed himself with "a nine-inch sharp object" to respond if attacked (*Townsville Sun*, 24 April 1996).

This is a far cry from "a clip on the ear" or a "size 10 police boot" or the inevitable public caning or flogging, although they were all proposed. Nor are they just the exasperated threats of people who have come to the end of their tether. There is a real viciousness directed against young people, a viciousness that is fuelled by the perception that society is breaking down and that real and potential victims of crime are no longer important. Some of that feeling is expressed nostalgically by those letter writers who recall their own halcyon childhood and the physical punishment that made them the people they are today. Others seem to prefer a cleansing of the streets of young people whose mere presence appears to threaten their property and their lives. Interestingly, the parents of juvenile offenders are not seen to be among the victims of crime; they are constructed as part, even cause, of the juvenile crime problem.

Parental responsibility

Blaming parents for their children's offending is another lively subtext in Townsville newspapers' campaign against juvenile crime. The Coalition Government in Queensland, generally paralysed on most issues by an abrupt injection into office in 1996 and continuing Criminal Justice Commission hearings into the Mundingburra by-election that got it there, has received wide community and Opposition support for its campaign for tougher changes to the *Juvenile Justice Act 1992*. Central to the changes are proposals for the increased supervision of parents of juvenile offenders. Under the headline, 'Night blitz on juveniles' (*Townsville Bulletin*, 18 June 1996), a police operation over four nights that found over 300 juveniles on the streets in the early hours of the morning, the newspaper noted:

> *The police operation has come less than three weeks after Attorney-General Denver Beanland indicated specific changes to the Juvenile Justice Act, many involving the parents of offending children. He warned that parents of juvenile offenders may have to pay up to $5000 compensation. The new laws could also force parents to attend court with their children or face a charge.*

This change to the Act is in response to a general community perception that parents are complicit in the offending of their children, either by being indifferent to what they do or as the consequence of previous neglect in the childrens' upbringing. The same newspaper report on the "night blitz" conveyed police perceptions about parents' inability to control their children.

> *Police declined to elaborate on the number and ages of the juveniles but said they took some of them home more than once. Police said some parents had been unaware of their children's whereabouts and a few seem unconcerned* (*Townsville Bulletin*, 18 June 1996).

Parental complicity in juvenile offending is a niggling worry for some. State Parliamentarian McElligott asserted that Aboriginal children in one section of Thuringowa are "with adults who appear to be deliberately using children to steal items, including alcohol" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 20 July 1996), and an editorial in the *Townsville Bulletin* felt that "those parents in our community who appear to encourage, either tacitly or overtly, their children's criminal behaviour should be made accountable" (25 July 1996). Yet this suggestion of complicity does not appear to be the main worry of Townsville residents.

Parental neglect and the breakdown of the family are proposed as more popular causes for juvenile offending. One correspondent attributed juvenile crime to a number of factors, the first of which was "the breakdown of the traditional family where at one time, values and the concepts of right and wrong were taught – sometimes with physical enforcement" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 25 April 1996). The Chairperson of the Thuringowa Crime Prevention Committee targeted parents' (women's?) need to work as a cause of juvenile crime.

"A lot of the problems these days is the parenting," he said. "Today both parents often have to work, leaving the kids at home. It is only natural that they would get into mischief, it's human nature. They are basically good kids, they just need something to fill their time" (*Townsville Sun*, 17 April 1996).

Support, but with a twist, for the family breakdown thesis came from an editorial in the *Townsville Bulletin* which blamed bureaucrats for lack of parental responsibility.

> *There is, as many parents will testify, so much interference from bureaucrats, social workers, counsellors and others in the lives of families in Australia today that it is no wonder that some parents abrogate their responsibilities to them in defeat* (Editorial, *Townsville Bulletin*, 31 May 1996).

Nevertheless, there were defenders of parents. In response to the proposal for restitution of up to $5000 by parents for the crimes of their children, one letter writer said, "It seems pretty clear to me that parents need help not punishment and it is equally clear they need it right at the beginning of parenthood, not after the horse has bolted" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 23 May 1996). An academic, Richard Hil, "disputed the idea that juvenile crime was the result of a lack of discipline and poor parenting. He said his research had found parents of juvenile offenders had made overwhelming attempts at trying to stop their children from offending" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 15 May 1996). These voices, however, were muted in the general agreement of both official and popular sentiment that parents were to blame for their childrens' offending.

Reporting juvenile crime

The reporting of juvenile crime in Townsville/Thuringowa is always the same. The themes of juvenile irresponsibility, family breakdown and coercive punishment occur and reoccur in local newspapers. As one local government councillor wrote, in a letter to the editor, "The problems are all the same and are discussed at length. The solutions proposed are many and varied, but always the same" (*Townsville Bulletin*, 1 June 1996).

Because the stories are always the same, they tap into a deeply-held community paranoia about the undeserving and the unwanted in society. The way the stories are told, most people live in a besieged community of the law-abiding and propertied. Those besieged are not well-to-do; they are the aged, families, those who have worked hard to own a house and a car. Around the swirling periphery of this community is an imagined dark, anarchic maelstrom of young people whose very presence threatens the security of the community with possible theft and violence. For most correspondents in Townsville/Thuringowa, juvenile crime and its discussion serve to emphasise and harden these polarities in the community.

The portrayal of all youth on the streets as gang members bent on criminality serves to fashion them as targets for (pre-emptive) intimidation and violence. Indigenous youth are especially vulnerable to this because of the wider context of racism in juvenile crime reporting (Sheiner 1993), xenophobia attendant on the March 1996 Federal election campaigns and confrontations between Aboriginal communities, mining companies and the Queensland Government in northern Queensland. Opinions about who is to blame and what should be done slot easily into well-worn ruts in the Australian psyche. The undeservingness of Aborigines blends neatly with the idea of lawless youth to bolster primal worries about the breakdown of family and civilisation. It is no coincidence that a 16-year-old Aboriginal girl, as reported at the beginning of this chapter, was racially insulted and then shot at this particular place and time; she becomes a likely target because of her dual exclusion, her youth and her Aboriginality. Violence and racism go hand in hand in "law and order" campaigns in Townsville. This is as true for juveniles, as this chapter has shown, as it has been for indigenous park dwellers who have also been subject to official and unofficial violence and intimidation.

There are no easy solutions. Racism, violence, fear and anxiety are so deeply ingrained within Australian life that their current re-emergence on national and local stages is not so much the shock of something new as a bemused recognition of old foes. Solutions do not lie in just segregating young people in rural workcamps (*Townsville Bulletin*, 27 April 1996) or merely apportioning blame or punishment. As the secretary of the Townsville Victims of Crime Association emphasised,

> *We have to address the whole problem. We have to address why kids get involved in it, what we can do as a community to prevent it, what sort of action the council, the State Government, even the Federal Government can do to ensure that the juveniles don't continue to create this violent society* (*Townsville Bulletin*, 31 May 1996).

There was little of this breadth of vision in Townsville in the first half of 1996.

John Hillel

Reading television news

Reporting "train surfing" on commercial television

THE CONSTRUCTION of television news is determined largely according to a pre-determined agenda and a strategy based firmly on viewing figures (Ericson et al. 1987; Morley 1986; Tiffin 1989). Sparks (1992) demonstrates that crime is not only high on the agenda of news organisations, but that fear of crime generated by television's treatment of it is not matched by the recorded incidence of crime in the community (see also Silverstone 1994). That the representation of crime, particularly in television news, has an accumulative impressionistic effect on audiences was highlighted in a 1990 Australian Broadcasting Tribunal report on television violence prompted by community concern over the Queen and Hoddle Street shootings (Australian Broadcasting Tribunal 1990).

Through a close analysis of two television news texts, I explore the particular representations of youth crime that are being encouraged by popular television's treatment of such events in the news.

For a story to rate a mention on the main commercial television news programs, it must be of high dramatic content and/or arouse special public interest. As Marshall and Kingsbury (1996) assert, "News is generally presented in contexts of audience demands for novelty, urgency and universality" (p.42). However, despite its inherent drama and tragedy the fact that the story of a "train surfing death" (riding on the top of a moving train) headed the news on all Victorian television news channels (except SBS) on Friday, 5 January 1996, is perhaps more a statement of the lack of other high drama news on that day and the "out of ratings" period it fell in, than about its relative television newsworthiness. The story is interesting, not just because it made the headlines on the evening bulletins of television news, but because it deals with the consequences of a crime in which the only victim was the perpetrator.

In the analysis that follows I have compared two news broadcasts of the same story by two commercial television stations in Melbourne. Through the analysis I suggest how meaning has been created through the text together with suggestions as to what those meanings might be. I also demonstrate how different readings can be derived from two apparently similar commercial news broadcasts. Further, I show how the constructions reinforce particular attitudes and assumptions about teenagers and their subcultures.

The theoretical framework

As a theoretical basis for this task I draw on the original work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) and the application of semiotic theory to news by John Hartley (1982).

Semiology is a method for analysing systems of meaning that has its foundations in the work of the Swiss linguist de Saussure. His initial work has been the subject of prolonged debate and refinement. In its pure form, as developed by C.S. Pierce, semiotics (literally, "the science of signs") is a complex and precise tool and in its formal technical application the language is specialised and, therefore, inaccessible to the general reader. The tool has been particularly useful in the analysis of media texts. Where a close analysis of specific texts is required in order to expose constructed meanings, it provides an invaluable methodology. By simplifying the methodology and avoiding the more technical (though more precise) terminology that would make any such analysis more scientific, I hope to be able to apply the tool without obscuring meaning.

The fundamental principle of semiology is that language and images are made up of signs and that signs generate meaning. At the simple level signs are denotative; that is, they provide a simple label to identify something. At the more complex level they are connotative, in that they recall meanings associated with the sign.

The signs in a text result from choices offered by the possibilities existing within a sign system. The term "text" here is used to describe the images and sounds associated with the news program under study together with its delivery medium (in this case television). Put simply: "a text is a combination of signs" (Thwaites et al. 1994, p.67). Such choices may be made in various ways and for a variety of reasons: they may be made consciously, for example, by an editor selecting one shot rather than another, or by a scriptwriter selecting one word rather than another. A choice may be forced on the text through necessity, for example, there may be no other position available for a camera, or there may be only one person available for that interview. Choices may be made for convenience, for example, a person just happened to be there at the right time. In television in particular, choices may be made by selecting what seems "natural", or what follows the conventions of the discourse (for example, camerawork). Thus a short person, or a child will generally be shot from a high angle because it is the convention of news reporting to hold the camera at the eye level of the cameraperson, who is usually adult and usually male (a high angle view of a subject tends to make that subject appear submissive rather than dominant). The actual choices made will ultimately depend upon the particular viewpoint being accepted by the text. This viewpoint may be obvious and dominant – in which case we might call it bias, or it might be subtle, resulting from underlying attitudes or opinions or understandings. These subtle choices serve to anchor a sign into a particular meaning frame, or paradigm. It is these paradigms that I am most concerned to identify because they tell us something about the kinds of meaning being generated and what that meaning might be.

One possible way of generating meaning is through the choices of people, or objects which embody iconic or mythical meaning; that is, they may bring to mind meanings through what has become predominantly accepted as common experience, or attitude. For example in Australia, there are certain dominant conceptions about what the signs "woman" and "man" mean. The concept of "woman" can stand, among other things, for nurturer, mother, carer, femaleness and so forth. Likewise, "man" can stand for authority, physical power, father, maleness. The extent to which such meaning becomes significant in a text depends upon the context and the presentation which surrounds and supports the subject. Sometimes, especially where the iconic meaning is particularly powerful, (for example, a mother grieving at the death of her child) the absent figure can be perceived as being replaced by another. This generally occurs where a person who might otherwise be expected to be present in a text, is absent. A psychological void is created, through audience expectations generated either by the text, or convention, or supporting myths. Usually the replacement is a person of the same gender, who can then be understood to be taking on that role and its accompanying meanings. The tendency for a television text to seek closure by making an audience feel reassured by what is shown will tend to drive such substitutions and consequently, the choices. As Cashmore (1994, p.193) suggests: "Television encourages (the viewer) to recognize a certain security, reassurance and authority in its statements ..."

Further, as demonstrated by the Glasgow Media Group (1976, 1980, 1982), chosen sign systems are inherently ideological. By identifying the chosen sign systems we can discover clues about the underlying ideological/political frameworks contained within the text. Ideologies may be generally accepted; if they are, then they may be described as "dominant ideologies". Commercial television and commercial television news, because they exist fundamentally to generate revenue for shareholders through advertising, are parts of a dominant ideology that might be called "capitalism". Thus, the news inevitably supports other dominant ideologies of the capitalist system such as a particular kind of law and order, particular kinds of authority and, arguably, particular dominant understandings of what it means to be male and female, or a "teenager" from a particular socioeconomic group. To support these "accepted understandings" television news creates "preferred readings" in its texts; that is, it creates texts which conform to the dominant ideology through its selection of some signs and the rejection of others. This is not to say that sign system choices will necessarily be the same within a given ideology; what is demonstrated through the analysis of these selected texts is the way different choices can be made and which produce different constructions that in turn support aspects of the same dominant ideology. The danger is that for an audience, preferred readings, when applied to the news, may become synonymous with "fact" or "truth". By exposing and questioning the preferred readings and by suggesting alternative oppositional readings the choices buried in the text can be examined and the constructed meanings exposed and questioned.

Reporting an event

The text of the news report on channel ATV 10 at 5 pm on Friday 5 January 1996, opens with a close-up of the male presenter. An inset panel to the top right of the screen shows a still shot of a suburban train passing under a bridge. The bridge forms a link with a later part of the story when we learn that the victim, a teenage boy, was killed as the train passed under a bridge. The image is framed in a green and gold border, colours of the Met train system. A caption under the still reads, "'surfer' tragedy". The word "tragedy" is in bold upper case type in a font twice as large as the word "surfer" – which is in inverted commas. This device serves to anchor the event in a "human tragedy" paradigm, rather than the alternative "crime" paradigm which might also be a possibility given the illegal nature of the activity in which the teenagers were engaged.The presenter says:

> *Heading the news, the train stunt that's ended in death for a teenager. The 17-year-old was surfing on the roof of a Met carriage and was slammed into a road bridge over the track. The impact sent him flying into the path of another train on a line between Croydon and Mooroolbark. Police say locals knew the boy as a street kid and graffiti artist. Laureen Deal has the details.*

The term "stunt" is interesting in that it removes the action from a criminal activity paradigm and instead connotes "daring actions carried out for public display". The use of the term "surfing" is drawn from a teenager's colloquial language base. It functions as a shorthand identifier for the activity. No explanation of the term is offered. "Surfing" is identified as commonplace enough for the audience to know the meaning already.

Words like "slammed" and "flying" are drama-filled terms which help to provide a dramatic entree to the descriptions that follow and presumably involve the viewer in the drama of the reconstructed events. "Flying" is also a graphic reference back to the act itself: the victim was in virtual flight when on top of the train. This connotes a "dare-devil", a risk-taker for excitement. Related to the previously discussed "stunt" it connotes excitement, verve, daring – connotations that would presumably find a sympathetic audience among the victim's peers and might even suggest a degree of heroism.

The use of the terms "street kid" and "graffiti artist" to describe the victim negates other, less sympathetic possibilities such as "drop out" or "graffiti vandal". The language suggests a "wildness", a "free spirit" which taken together with "surfing" and "stunt" makes the "tragic accident" paradigm possible. It also allows a certain celebratory element to intrude – a celebration of that youth discourse which is characterised by an openness to adventure, even at risk to personal safety.

We cut to a shot of the platform at Croydon railway station in Melbourne. Two "teenage" girls are embracing. In the background are three other girls seated on a bench seat. Two are smiling and talking. The other girl does not appear to be part of the group and is partly watching the camera and partly watching the platform. One of the girls looks towards the camera and makes a remark to her companion. On the wall above the seated group are scrawled the words "RIP TRIGS" [sic]. A female reporter, Laureen Deal, speaks in voice-over. Her voice is measured, with a suggestion of gravity:

> *Friends of Billy Rowe gathered at the Croydon railway station this afternoon. R.I.P. Trigger [sic] daubed around the platform, it was the teenager's graffiti tag. The 17-year-old had surfed a train before. His mates who were on the train with him last night say they won't do it again.*

The use of a male reporter here would work in opposition to the preferred reading of "tragedy" and might signify crime and/or authority. The decision to use a female enables her to stand in for the grieving mother. The "tragedy" reading is given further support by the grave voice of the reporter. However, the image shown is somewhat in opposition to this preferred reading. In the first shot, the "teenagers" are not apparently showing emotion that might correspond to grieving. If the subjects were showing emotion, one might reasonably assume the camera would have captured this – it would make for a better picture than the backs of the girls do. The shot that follows shows a close-up of two girls in an almost identical embrace to the wide shot, but this time we can see their faces and one of them is apparently crying. The subjects are so similar in their positions and their clothing to the previous wide shot that a quick viewing might lead one to believe that these are in fact the same two girls. In fact they are not. In the normal conventions of screen language this would constitute a jump cut – a jump in time or subject which cannot be covered by the use of a device such as a cutaway to facilitate a smooth editing transition. In the conventions of screen drama the wide shot is an establishing shot that enables us to see the location and the protagonists. The next logical shot would be the close-up; having established the dramatic sequence (the two girls embracing) we need to get closer to exploit the dramatic moment. The close shot has been chosen to match the wide shot, even though the action is not continuous. The intention presumably, is to give the impression of continuous action by using the dramatic convention, even though the original footage would not allow this. The preferred reading is that this is a tragic moment and that the girls are grieving for their lost "mate".

Another wide shot of the same platform follows. People are standing or sitting on the ground. Seven of the nine people in the shot appear to be alone. Four are sitting on benches and two are apparently seated on the ground. A male in the foreground has his head in his hands. A female in the middle ground has one hand on her face. To the left of screen two teenage girls converse. The words "RIP TRIGS" are written in black felt pen on a white steel beam to the right of screen. There is a connection with the previous shot in that one of the girls turns to look at the camera and we can recognise that she was one of the figures who passed in the background during the previous action. No-one is smiling. The figure in the foreground with his head in his hands has been chosen presumably to support the "grieving" paradigm established with the females in earlier shots. We cannot know why he actually has his head in his hands, but the sign is given meaning by what has gone before in this text.

We then see an example of the "RIP TRIGS" graffiti in another location. The choice of the word "daubed" in the voice over is interesting – it suggests paint, although the images we see show the graffiti has apparently been drawn in felt pen; it also suggests protest – as in daubed slogans. What, then are the "teenagers" protesting about? The meaninglessness of a life that leads them to look for thrills in an effort to feel alive – even, perhaps in ways that may prove fatal. The preferred reading may well be that the "teenagers" are joining with us in protesting at what we are told is described by "senior police" as "a tragic waste of life".

The victim has been described in the introduction as a "graffiti artist". However, the graffiti shown is clearly not intended to be artistic: it is roughly drawn with no attempt at artistic embellishment. The graffiti functions in the text as a sign of teenage grief. It stands as a symbol, not only for the life of the "teenage graffiti artist", but also for the feelings of the "teenagers" shown here; young people who, we are to believe, are expressing grief and protest. The graffiti is thus diverted from the "vandalism" discourse that frequently describes adult attitudes to this kind of activity, an attitude that might also apply to actions such as climbing onto the roof of a train.

In the next shot a young male is interviewed, described in a caption as "Robbie Reiffel, friend". He is standing outside the station wearing a casual top, not wearing a school uniform. The subject is shot full face and in a close-up. As he speaks, the camera closes in to a tighter shot. In a serious voice, he says:

> *Yes, it's not worth it real(ly), you'll end up dead. There's been ... (indecipherable) ... lots of people, heaps of people, Billy's not the first and he won't be the last.*

The text is being moved further towards a "those who take risks for the entertainment of others" paradigm.

Here the "friend" is allowed to stand in for the "sensible adult". He suggests that the activity is foolhardy "not worth it", but that it will continue: "he won't be the last". This young person, then, will not "surf" trains again, but with a metaphorical shaking of the head, an unspoken "what can you do with young people", he accepts that others will. The statement is given status by the close-up while the camera lens movement that takes us closer to his face (closer to his thoughts) emphasising the importance of the statements.

The shot that follows shows the boy in a wider shot, with the reporter evident in a "point-of-view" position in the foreground. The young person is standing with his hands in his pockets, obviously ill at ease with the situation. The reporter is dressed smartly in a white jacket and she is holding a piece of electronic equipment (presumably a mobile phone, or perhaps a microphone). We no longer hear the interview, but a voice-over of the reporter starting to describe the accident in factual detail. Although not immediately noticeable, this shot has been set up in a different location, or at least, from a different angle than the previous shot of the interview. The young person interviewed is shown standing against a background of the station building. Whereas in the previous shot a shallower depth of field (focus tolerance) has been used to obscure the background, in this shot the background is in focus. Whereas in the previous shot our attention is focused on the person, in this shot we see the person within his environment. Here he is made to appear isolated and alone – no other people are in shot – his isolation is emphasised by his demeanour which looks awkward and ill at ease. His dress, the slightly rough clothing of a "kid on the streets", is more evident. The overall tone of this image, slightly unkempt hair, the lack of formal school uniform, hands in pockets, an awkward gait, fulfils stereotypical expectations of an image of a "child at risk". In the previous shot where he stands in for the voice of "good sense" he is allowed to be articulate, in this shot he is mute – an object of our concern – he has become the victim *in absentia.*

There follows a narrative of the event told by the reporter with a series of supporting shots of the train passing under a bridge and the railway line. One shot places us as the spectator in the position of the victim with the camera held at near ground level, close to one of the rails, while a train comes towards us. This dramatic device places us in the role of victim and is used to heighten verisimilitude – we can identify with the fear that the victim would have felt. The fact that the victim (according to the report) was unconscious, having already collided with the bridge, is ignored for the sake of the dramatic realisation. The pace of the voice-over slows slightly to increase the gravity of the statement: "He died at the scene twenty minutes later."

Two policemen in uniform are shown from a high level shot crossing the railway lines. The commentary states:

> *Senior police claim the youth had been drinking. They have described the death as a tragic waste of life.*

The association of alcohol with the police allows a paradigmatic shift from "human tragedy" and "grief" to "problems of youth as perceived by those in authority". The paradigm shift is assisted by the use of males as the "voices of authority" to comment on the incident. A complete shift to "crime" or "juvenile crime" is avoided by the choice of words selected from the press conference given by the Chief Inspector:

> *It must serve as a warning there to other youths there – this skylarking, this dangerous actions there on top of the trains on hanging out of trains there, can only lead to serious injuries if not, like in this case, fatal accident [sic].*

The term "skylarking" is significant. It is not one that would be familiar to a young audience, so one must assume that the remarks are addressed to an adult audience – parents, perhaps. Although the sign denotes an adult's disapproval of "childish" behaviour, it does not, however, connote "criminal action" – rather, "foolhardy playfulness". The officer is able to fulfil a dual role – he stands in for the authority of the absent (male) parent through what he says and for the authority of the police through his uniform and formal status.

The officer is shot in medium close-up (head and shoulders) which allows us to see his epaulettes. The device serves to emphasise the officer's status.

There follows an interview with a (male) representative of the Public Transport Commission. He reinforces what the policeman said:

> *I would say anybody who decides to climb out of a train is clearly putting themselves in a position of great danger.*

The representative is wearing the uniform of the businessman or professional (a jacket and formal tie), a sign which denotes male status. He is shot in the street against some traffic noise. The interview contrasts with that of the police officer which was obviously set up for the occasion at a press conference. This interview is intended to be read as occurring "on the run" and the location provides an atmosphere of immediacy, or urgency to the interview, suggestive of investigative journalism, the reporter trying to find out who might be responsible, who to blame, perhaps.

Next, a male local resident, wearing an open-necked shirt, is shown in close-up commenting on problems surrounding the rail-line.

> *Reporter: Residents who live near the line say train surfing is just one of a number of problems.*
> *Resident: ... they put rocks on the line and stop the train, sort of thing.*

The resident contrasts with the "voices of authority" seen earlier. He is not a young person and he is not in uniform, nor in the formal dress of the businessman, or professional. His dress and demeanour allow him to be associated with the "teenagers" who are the subject of the story, rather than with the male adults seen previously. He is apparently from a similar socio-economic group as the "friend" seen earlier and is about the age that the parents of the "teenagers" might be. In this way he is able to function as "concerned parent" in the text. The use of the term "problems" by the reporter continues to deny criticism of the victim, but instead shifts towards unspecified blame; this is a problem (expressed in terms of the act rather than any underlying causes) that (presumably) someone needs to solve.

The closure shifts the text back to the "grief" and "human tragedy" paradigms by showing a teenage female in close-up. She is obviously distraught, crying and nervously stroking her hair. She is apparently unaware of the camera. This is different from signs seen previously; earlier shots of teenage girls allowed them to be aware of the camera, however, this shot denies that possibility. The viewer becomes a voyeur, looking in on the private grief of an individual. The reading is assisted by the choice of shot which captures the subject behind the bars of a gate. The bars connote a "prison", "prisoner of private grief", perhaps. The drama of the moment is heightened by the use of a big close-up. The text ends with a high angle shot of a train passing.

The same story was reported on channel GTV 9, Friday 5 January 1996, 6 pm.

Although similar in many respects, in particular in the structure of the story and the footage used, the report produces different meaning from the ATV 10 treatment of the story.

The text opens with the male presenter in medium close-up. He introduces the story:

> *Good evening, the deadly practice of train surfing has claimed another life.*

There is a cut to a closer shot with a still of a train passing under a rail bridge superimposed in the top right hand of the screen. The caption reads TRAIN 'SURFING' DEATH and the word CROYDON in white on a dark red/maroon background is placed at the top of the still. The train has more verisimilitude or semblance of truth than that used for the ATV 10 picture, as it is of one of the trains that has opening windows, whereas the ATV 10 picture was of a later train that would not have opening windows. The use of red for the background of the "Croydon" caption (rather than the green and gold of the ATV 10 picture) is revealing – it is not the bright red of fresh blood, but rather a sombre red, almost maroon, bringing to mind, perhaps, the colour of dried blood, or the sombre colours of a funeral parlour. The lettering of "train" and "death" is emphasised by being larger than the word "surfing". They are in gold lettering, similar to the gold that is part of the Met colour schema. The presenter continues the introduction:

> *A 17-year-old boy riding the roof of a Met carriage died after hitting a bridge and falling into the path of another train. Police and the Met say it should serve as a warning not to take risks on the railways.*

In contrast to ATV 10 the choice of language refuses the dramatic and instead seeks to place the story in a paradigm that might be described as "adults warning about the consequences of foolish behaviour". The sign is reinforced through the voice of the presenter, which is forceful and grave. By allowing the report to refer back to other (unspecified) incidents and using the words "deadly practice" the introduction takes on the tone of a warning. The warning is reinforced by using the quotation from "the police and the Met".

A male reporter's voice speaks over images of teenage girls on the station platform:

> *At Croydon station grieving friends gathered after the death of their mate Billy, whose graffiti tag "Trigger" [sic] strewn across the station with "rest in peace" added.*

The accompanying shots show a group of three young females in close-up. They are embracing and rocking, apparently comforting each other. We cannot see their faces fully, but part of the face of one of the girls can be seen as she breaks away from the group, the movement of her hand towards her face as the camera cuts to another shot suggests she has been crying.

The shot which follows shows a group of three young people. One is facing the camera holding a polystyrene cup, the other two are walking out of shot. The girl facing the camera says something and both she and another teenager turn to look at something. None of the subjects appear to be upset, though they are not laughing or smiling. Three different shots of graffiti drawn in felt pen saying "RIP TRIGS" are shown.

The sequence is more "businesslike" and factual than the ATV 10 report. The only vocal emphasis by the reporter is on the words "Rest in Peace", otherwise his tone is factual, matter of fact. The choice of a male reporter does not permit a reading of "grieving mother" as in the ATV 10 report. The male voice allows the warning discourse to be maintained.

We cut to an interview with the same young person used in the ATV 10 report. His name is not revealed at this time. The subject is shot in a semi-profile close-up. He says:

> *He loved doing it, he was the best at it (sniff).*

The use of a close-up gives the statement impact and the selection of words is significant because it is somewhat in opposition to what has been shown before (the girls crying). Although the sniff could be interpreted as a sign of grief, it is ambiguous and might just be a personal habit. The statement suggests a celebration of the victim's prowess at train surfing. Linked with the grieving sequence shown earlier, it suggests a wake, or a funeral eulogy. On the other hand, in the "warning" paradigm, it serves to suggest that the practice is well known and generally accepted by this group. In describing the victim as "the best" he is suggesting that there must be others who also surf, but who are presumably not as good at it. It also introduces a suggestion of (possibly ongoing) competition.

A sequence of three high level shots of a moving train follows, accompanied by a voice-over from the reporter:

> *The 17-year-old whose full name has not been released became the third fatal victim of surfing, riding on top of moving trains.*

Here, knowledge about the meaning of the term "surfing" in this context is not assumed and there is a reference back to the introduction with the mention of two earlier fatalities. This is the only story treatment which suggests that the name of the victim had not been released.

There follows a reconstruction of the event accompanied by pencil sketches of the victim climbing out of the carriage, standing on the roof, being hit by the bridge and falling onto the adjacent line.

The reporter's commentary refuses any dramatic embellishments, the victim "hit the Dorset Road Bridge" and he "rolled onto the rails". The suggestion that he had been drinking is qualified by the rider: "his friends say he was not drunk". This serves to continue to anchor the reading as a warning against this kind of activity, rather than against drinking per se. The "warning" paradigm is again supported with the final statement in the sequence: "Police say it must serve as a warning to others."

The interview with the police Inspector is identical to the ATV 10 segment. However the choice of shot is different – a closer shot than in the ATV 10 report, but with one epaulette, the symbol of authority and status, still evident by the placement of the frame. The shot of the inspector is only held for a short time and we cut to a shot of a train passing under a bridge and police walking across the railway line. The sequence gives the inspector less status than was granted in the ATV 10 sequence, the importance of what he is saying being sacrificed for the sake of the interest of visuals which do not have any direct relationship to what is being said.

A shot of the reporter standing next to a railway line close to a bridge follows. As with the ATV 10 report, the crime paradigm is avoided by the reporter describing the practice of surfing as "a problem". There is also some suggestion that something should have been done to prevent the accident in a further reference to previous accidents of this kind and a reference to the Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett:

> *Reporter:* *While it is not the first tragedy of this kind on the Met system, the Public Transport Corporation says the problem of surfing on its trains is a difficult one to control and so says the Premier.*
>
> *Kennett:* *It's no point looking to governments, its no point looking to police forces, we cannot stop the stupid from being stupid.*

The inclusion of this statement from the Premier not only further anchors the text into the "warning" paradigm but it also introduces for the first time a directly censorious note about the practice and the individual, a sign refused by the ATV 10 report. Grief by adults or "the community" at the death is absent, both in the way the reporter describes it and in the comments of the Premier. Instead, the chosen paradigm is: "Silly child suffering the consequences of his actions."

As a reinforcement to this statement, the report goes on to describe other problems on trains, linking this event to other forms of train-related aberrant behaviour. The reporter speaks over images of moving trains:

> *Residents living along the line say surfing's not the only problem. Youths regularly play chicken with trains too.*

We cut to an interview "grab" from a young adult female identified in a caption as "Amanda Venville, local resident".

> *They lay across the tracks and they just wait to see, you know, who can stay there the longest.*

The choice of the female resident might allow her to stand in as a mother figure, but the overall tone of the text and the matter-of-fact way she presents her statement, tends to deny this reading, instead she remains part of the censorious sequence.

The reporter continues in voice-over suggesting that the boys too, have "learned their lesson", and that:

> *Billy's mates say their surfing days are over.*

The supporting visual for this statement is quite odd. The image shows a wide shot from outside a waiting room of a group of three young people inside the room looking at, and apparently commenting on the presence of the camera. Close to the camera, in the foreground, is a man, his back to us, wearing a purple T-shirt and speaking into a mobile phone. He could be a reporter, or he could be a member of the public. Close to this figure is a young male, as he looks towards the camera we can see he has dirt on his face. In the background is the tripod (presumably) of another news film crew, with a camera assistant or operator next to it lighting a cigarette. At one point he glances towards our camera. The sign could be read as a commentary on the media process itself, although this is presumably not the preferred reading. One is left wondering whether the young people inside the waiting room had got tired of the whole process and had withdrawn to get away from the reporters. Presumably the preferred reading is meant to be that this scene shows a sample of the victim's friends and is intended to lead us into the next shot, which is a close-up of the young male interviewed earlier.

Unlike the earlier segment, when the interviewee's response could be regarded as negative, in this segment the young person is formally identified as: "Robbie Reiffel, friend". The interview segment is identical to that used in the ATV10 interview; however, the background (it appears to be a station wagon) is different and the shot size is closer:

> *Yes, it's not worth it real(ly), you'll end up dead. There's been … (indistinct) … lots of people, heaps of people, Billy's not the first and he won't be the last.*

From matching the two interviews it appears that they were taken at the same time, but with different camera positions. The young person was apparently interviewed by both TV news services at the same time in the mode of a press conference. He is placed in the role of "expert", being allowed to comment on what has been determined as a "problem". In the Kennett press conference we saw the voice of authority stating that it was up to the individual and that the state was powerless to stop this activity. With this young "expert" we get the promise that the problem will continue. The sign is a metaphorical shaking of the head, a shrugging of the shoulders, an unverbalised, "what can we do?" The answer, according to the voice of authority, we already know is "nothing". The finality of the statement is reinforced by the reporter taking no further part in the commentary. His verbal signing off is accompanied by a shot of some young females embracing each other. On this occasion, however, the person whose face we can see is apparently smiling and laughing as she talks and embraces her friend. The preferred reading may be that the grief remains, along with the "problem". However, the demeanour of the young person whose face we see serves to somewhat undercut this reading and suggests that grieving is not in sufficient evidence for the cameras to capture signs of it – instead we see young females apparently enjoying themselves. The ambiguity of the sign and its juxtaposition with the previous interview could arguably support a paradigm shift from "grief" to, "devil-may-care".

Two reports of the same story with apparently very similar approaches and similar footage can produce quite different meanings. In the ATV 10 report the text was systematically slanted to support a "human tragedy" paradigm. In doing so any censoring of the victim's behaviour was refused. Although the GTV 9 report stopped short of accepting the "crime" paradigm, it provided a text that was censorious of the act of "surfing" and one which set out to provide a warning about the consequences of such behaviour. There is an ambiguity in the GTV 9 report which is unresolved between the two paradigms of "youthful folly" and "tragedy". However, the high profile presence of the police in both reports allows the crime paradigm to be an underlying signifier in both the texts.

One problem with this kind of analysis, highlighted by Morley (1980, 1986), that must be acknowledged, is that it does not take sufficient account of the role of the viewer in making her/his own choices as to meaning contained in a text. The role of the reader of the text as an active participant in the process of creating meaning has received increasing foregrounding in media theory (Silverstone 1994). I have made no attempt to consider the creation of meaning by the adult or child reader. What I have done is to limit myself to highlighting how meaning may be generated through the text. How the audience then receives such texts must be the subject of further investigation that is outside the scope of this chapter.

Furthermore, the news is a sign system that uses a variety of codes and conventions to present what has been selected in a particular way that is familiar to an audience. These signs and codes are different to those contained in, for example, a soap opera, or a comedy, but audiences are skilled at interpreting these codes within the traditions of the discourses from which they are drawn. This very familiarity may blunt awareness of how meaning is created by a text. However, multiple readings must be allowed and one can only speculate at what audiences might read from a sign. What I have done is to highlight specific ways in which the text limits the range of possible interpretations or meanings that might be read.

As in most work of this kind, the questions identified in this brief analysis only go part of the way to understanding the television news discourses. Pioneering work by Hall et al. of the Glasgow Media Group (1976, 1980, 1982) has demonstrated how the news creates its own realities and supports its own dominant ideologies through the various paradigmatic choices it makes. I have made no attempt to suggest what ideological basis there may be for the various choices made in these texts, but this, together with a consideration of audience would form a valuable extension to the analysis.

Phil Crane

Whose views? Whose interests?

The absence of young people's voices in mainstream media reports on crime

> *Communication confers power. Without a voice, the young are powerless ...*
> (Australian Centre for Independent Journalism 1992, p.44).

YOUNG PEOPLE are excluded from the naming of social issues and from the processes of developing responses to these issues (White 1994; Bessant 1996). Youth-related issues such as juvenile crime are highlighted and policy developed with little or no attention to the perspectives of young people.

This chapter explores the themes of exclusion and participation in relation to the portrayals of young people and crime in the mainstream media. Who is considered a legitimate source of information by the media, to what extent do the portrayals of juvenile crime influence policy, and how can we improve the access of young people to the media?

The mainstream media and crime

Representations about the world are constructed from ideological positions (Fowler 1991, p.10) and the media should not be singled out as unique in this respect. The representation of news and social issues by the media is only one arena where ideological lenses sift and select, impute and embellish. What is special is the media's key role in the processes that contribute to the naming of problems and the generation of responses to social issues.

> *The media selects events which are atypical, presents them in a stereotypical fashion, and contrasts them against a backcloth of normality which is over-typical* (Lea & Young 1984, in White 1990, p.107).

Crime reports here are understood broadly to include the reporting of specific crimes, policing strategies, court procedures and sentencing, as well as news stories and features concerning crime generally.

The degree to which media affects policy varies according to the particular area of policy. For most people the media provides the only source of information on a number of youth issues, while it is of peripheral importance in relation to other issues. Given the location of responsibility for criminal justice administration and policing at the state level, crime is a bread and butter issue for regional and state-based mainstream media. These media are powerful and influential in relation to crime issues, especially when there are few alternative sources of information. In this chapter I make particular reference to Queensland, and although the political and media attention to juvenile crime has been particularly fierce in recent years in that State, the conclusions drawn are also applicable elsewhere.

The media are diverse both in type and in target audiences. (But not, alas, in ownership.) Some media products are specifically directed at young consumers and most of these have a commercial, profit-making orientation (magazines, radio and TV programs aimed at teenage audiences). The "mainstream media" refers to the mass market operations which dominate the major mediums of television, print, film and radio. While particular programs or time-slots are dedicated to younger audiences, the presentation and debate about crime occurs in media sites directed at "adult" audiences. The mainstream media representation of juvenile crime occurs principally through the large circulation daily and weekly newspapers, local and regional newspapers, television news and current affairs programs, and talkback, news and current affairs radio. Given the extent of coverage, the mainstream media can be very influential in determining political policy. Conversely, those sections of the non-mainstream media which allow young people to participate have less influence on policy processes.

The absence of young people's voices in the mainstream media

The absence of young people's voices in the mainstream print media is well documented. The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ 1992) examined 16 publications, including major dailies, regional dailies, suburban/student weeklies, weekly magazines and monthly magazines between 1988 and 1992. They also supplemented this research with individual issue case studies across a wide range of Australian publications. The study found that young people "have little or no voice in the predominant media outlets, and little or no representation except when it suits the ideology or prejudices of the media" (1992, p.5). The study also concluded that young people and criminal activity accounted for a major proportion of media coverage, contributing to young people being largely portrayed as problems. Conversely, student-operated newspapers gave relatively little attention to sensational issues such as crime, and projected young people as legitimate members of the community, reflected in their avoidance of age-based labelling. Indeed the conceptualisation of "youth" as a distinct social category appears not to exist in newspapers produced by young people themselves (ACIJ 1992).

In 1994, research was undertaken by the Youth Bureau, Queensland Department of Tourism, Sport and Racing into the portrayal of young people in the mainstream metropolitan and regional Queensland print media. The report has not been publicly released but was obtained through Freedom of Information application by a youth service after the department, contrary to previous indications, declined to make the report available. Seven Queensland newspapers were systematically analysed from the period 1 January to 15 June 1994, including the two metropolitan newspapers the *Courier Mail* and the *Sunday Mail*, and five regional papers. Every edition of the two metropolitan papers in the period was included in the sample (with a little over 1,000 articles about young people being identified), with periodic sampling of the regional papers allowing areas of similarity and difference to be identified. The key findings of the study were:

- certain groups of young people were largely absent from mainstream print media ... or featured in only limited types of stories. Aboriginal young people were the only group regularly identified among both the victims and perpetrators of crime, contributing to a largely negative image for that group;

- articles about issues relevant to young people often did not include the perspective of young people themselves, or of youth representatives. Articles where contents reflected negatively on young people, or which provided generalised and insupportable statements about them were seldom balanced by a comment from a young person or a youth representative;
- coverage of social issues relevant to young people takes the form of "explaining" young people to older people and the language used sometimes excluded young people from the readership of the article; and
- young people (especially teenagers) were blatantly stereotyped as stubborn, impolite and unconcerned with "adult" issues (Youth Bureau 1994a, p.5).

Given the methodology, the most comprehensive data was gained in relation to metropolitan papers and it is this data that is reported here. While some differences were apparent, the findings in relation to regional papers were generally consistent with those from metropolitan papers. It was found that in metropolitan papers 28% of all news stories relating to young people were about specific instances of crime. In 58% of these young people were represented as perpetrators of crime, and in 16% there was representation of both perpetrator and victim. Sixty-nine per cent of stories on crime and young people related to crimes against the person, and 15% to crimes against property. Twelve per cent of all stories relating to young people were about social issues, and of these 53% were about crime or law and order. Of social issue articles concerning crime or law and order, 47% concerned the crime rate, policing and the punishment of young people, 17% dealt with gangs, 14% about issues related to detention centres, and 8% with crime prevention strategies or support workers. When the proportion focusing on instances of crime is added to those social issue stories focusing on crime and law and order, the percentage of all items about young people where crime was the focus totals 34.5% (Youth Bureau, 1994a, pp.12–14, 22).

A distinction needs to be made between those reports which detail a specific instance of crime involving young people and those which provide an analysis, perspective or opinion on juvenile crime as a social issue. The reasons for this distinction lie in the different purposes these two types of reports have. The reporting of events is generally assumed to be a descriptive one. Here the dominant task of the media is providing information. A critique of the media in relation to these reports has tended to focus on what the media selects to report, and how the reporting is constructed. In reports which detail social issues the purpose of the media is to provide publicly accessible venues for the broader analysis of social and political life, a function associated with democratic ideals of free speech and citizen participation in public debate (see Stevenson 1995).

While one may not expect reports about specific instances of crime to include views from young people, the absence of young people as commentators, respondents and "experts" in the reporting of social issues is less defensible.

> *The most striking fact about the coverage of social issues relevant to young people is how few times a young person's, or even a youth worker's view is included in the analysis. Youth advocates were rarely quoted in response to derogatory comments about young people. Where young people were unfairly generalised, it was rare to see a correction of the facts provided by young people themselves, or those who represent them* (Youth Bureau 1994a, p.32).

The failure to make the distinction between the activities and characteristics of some young people, and that of all young people, allows young people to be characterised as a homogenous group that is "stubborn, impolite and unconcerned". So culturally ingrained are these ways of representing young people that, as with women and racial difference, until quite recently, derogatory use of humour was routinely used in media portrayals of young people.

> *Just when you half-heartedly wish your back-chatting, impolite adolescent would be afflicted with some illness to confine him or her to bed until the age of eighteen, you realise the awful truth, teenagers are malignantly healthy* (*Courier Mail*, 11 April 1994).

It is difficult to imagine another section of society being reported in such terms without there being considerable public comment, comment which would be reported in the media.

The authorisation of voices

Central to the media's selection and usage of sources are constructions about "who are the authorised knowers and what are the authoritative versions of reality" (Ericson et al. 1989, p.3). Such authority is generally not located in individuals. Though individual "credibility" or profile, can play a part, authoritativeness derives in large part from one's organisational affiliation or identity. The need to have some rationale to distinguish between "fact" and opinion means that media accounts are:

> *grounded in "objective" and "authoritative" statements from "accredited" sources. This means constantly turning to accredited representatives of major social institutions ... Such representatives are accredited because of their institutional power and position, but also because of their representative status* (Hall et al. 1978, p.58).

Young people are usually not considered "authoritative" sources on issues affecting young people, and organisations which advocate on youth issues are always open to the charge that they are not truly representative. Authoritative sources have access to the mainstream media; that is, they not only have their views reported, but the context of this coverage confers a favourable representation of their views (Ericson et al 1989, p.5). Young people and those who advocate for young people are rarely afforded such access in mainstream media reporting of crime-related themes.

Reporters and their "beats" are reflexively related (Fishman 1980, cited in Ericson et al. 1989, p.7), that is, reporters for particular issues such as crime can become part of that social setting, and should not be seen as separate from it. In a recent conversation I had with a sub-editor of a newspaper about stereotypical portrayals of young people and crime, and the propensity for a particular journalist to repeatedly write these stories, the sub-editor said: "Well its hardly surprising – he's been doing the police rounds for years, and it's just how he writes." Organisational factors, such as time and resource constraints, also affect the selection and reinforcement of certain types of sources rather than others (Hall et al. 1978, p.53). The police and other key players in the juvenile justice area, such as the children's court judiciary, are keenly aware of how important it is to use the media.

Media portrayals are also deeply cultural. The "sense making" of the media occurs on the premise that an "event only makes sense if it can be located within a range of known social and cultural identifications" (Hall et al. 1978, p.54). These are "cultural maps" of the social world (p.54) and journalistic practices seek to make events intelligible from a particular cultural standpoint or world view. Stereotypes about young people generally, and young people in particular are part of these cultural maps.

The "Grannies in fear"

It is difficult to describe an absence of something (Bessant 1996). The following case study, however, illustrates the extent to which the perspectives of young people do not appear in media representation of juvenile crime issues. During the first half of 1994, a "juvenile crime wave" was reported in Queensland. With a State election due in 1995, early 1994 was a critical period for the definition of core election issues. Law and order was one of the key election issues. The Goss-led Labor Government was to ultimately lose its grip on power.

For three months from January 1994 the *Sunday Mail* ran a number of regular, large, prominent articles on "youth crime". The influence of this newspaper together with its stable companion, the *Courier Mail*, is significant. The *Sunday Mail*, distributed throughout Queensland, often has the largest daily circulation figures for any newspaper in the State. The crime debate in this period shifted from asking whether there is a crime wave to claims about the "rising fear of crime". The following articles in the *Sunday Mail* appeared in rapid succession.

- 30 January, 'Grannies under siege', a two-page spread on pages 4 and 5 featuring 20 head shots of elderly women, most reporting experiences of theft from their homes.
- 6 February, 'Law and disorder, How young criminals thumb their noses at the police and society', a double-page spread on pages 6 and 7.
- 13 February, a collection of four articles on a double-page spread (pages 4 and 5) under the banner 'Living with crime: the brutal truth'. The central article, 'Grannies up in arms', focused on comment from the Queensland Family Services Minister alluding to media stereotyping and the inverse relationship of age to the likelihood of being a victim of violence. The Minister's views were rejected with ten head and shoulders photos of "grannies" and comment from the Opposition spokesperson on police.
- 20 February, 'Frightened resident uses gun: Intruder blasted', front page continued on page 2, and 'North wants bush justice: elderly victims of crime waves', a double-page spread on pages 6 and 7 of the same edition involved another "elderly residents" survey, this one conducted in a regional city, and reported via 20 head shots and comments, many specifying "juveniles" as the problem.
- 27 February, 'Louts storm flat: axe attack horror', front page, continued page 2.
- 6 March, 'Raids nab thieves', a double-page spread on crime, though not targeted at young people specifically.
- 13 March, 'Anger at soft line for crims: victims of crime speak out as thugs bring fear to the streets of a once peaceful town', a double-page spread on pages 6 and 7, involving 17 head shots and comments from women residents.
- 20 March, a one-page layout with two articles, 'Crime victims are biting back' and 'Pollies feel the pinch', a survey of politicians who had been victims of housebreaking.
- 3 April, 'Urban terror: armed gangs invade homes' front page, and 'Reign of the Urban Terrorist', a double-page spread on pages 6 and 7 including a collection of nine case studies of house robberies.
- 10 April, 'The graffiti wars', a double-page spread on pages 12 and 13.

What authoritative sources were cited in these articles? In order of frequency the sources cited were:

- the police are by far the most common and prominent source in most articles, though often reference to them is vague and non-identifying. For example, sources cited in these articles included "frustrated police mentioned in this story [who] cannot be named",

"some senior police officers", and police who "tipped us off";
- "local" residents, most of whom were stated as elderly, and as victims, or as living in fear of becoming victims;
- judges and magistrates, most frequently those with particular status, for example the President of the Children's Court;
- politicians;
- business/property owners or representatives;
- other victims;
- very occasionally, experts such as "someone who has studied the subcultures" or a psychiatrist are cited.

In this succession of prominent, particularly negative articles, young people, and their advocates are never used as sources of information. This is despite the orientation in many of these articles of presenting views on crime and young people as a social issue. The metaphors employed and nature of the "evidence" used are also important elements in these reports. Metaphors of war and violence are regularly used, together with the strong inference of intergenerational loathing (the young versus the elderly). The Queensland Governments' Youth Bureau research found in respect of this series of articles:

> *No substantive evidence other than anecdotal was produced to show that there is a crime wave in these areas, or that if there were, the victims were elderly and female (or that they are grandmothers) or that the perpetrators are young people. The imagery conveyed by the language and the quotes used is one of young criminals preying on elderly ladies* (Youth Bureau 1994a, pp.21–22).

The argument could be made that such reporting is harmless, and that it merely reflects community concern with crime. Research conducted for the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, however, found that Australians as a whole, greatly exaggerate their risks of falling victim to break and enter, motor vehicle theft, assault, and robbery, and explain this, at least in part, as a product of the media treatment of crime which has the effect of distorting public perceptions in a range of often subtle ways (Weatherburn, Matka & Lind 1996).

While much reporting occurs from the objectified perspective of one of an army of reporters, it is worth considering the role of the media "personality". The use of media personalities and regular commentators in newspaper columns, news and current affairs broadcasts, and talkback radio is commonplace and provides a capacity for opinion to be presented as fact, for the anecdotal to be inferred as the general, for barbed stereotyping to be seen as entertainment, and for some opinions and perspectives to be privileged above others, protected by the cloak of free speech. While little has been written about the role of such personality-based social commentaries in terms of how young people and crime are portrayed, there is some evidence that these often provide a platform for particularly savage treatment of young people. In early 1996 the television program *A Current Affair* conducted a series of reports on particular young people who were offered and declined jobs at Queensland resorts. Though not focusing on crime per se, these stories revealed how the media can weave together a range of deficiencies and imply "virtual criminality" about certain "types of" young people. The following extract comes from a syndicated column which appeared in the *Sunday Mail* shortly after the *A Current Affair* segments and was one of numerous such "spin-off" pieces in various media. It reflects the recurring themes of young people being worse than criminals, and of violent antipathy.

> *Call it fun-ugly. The kind of thing we'd all like to see. You know, like if someone went up to those three idiot dole kids who wouldn't take the resort jobs and just punched them real hard in the mouth. I mean you'd get arrested and all and you'd have to go to jail, but the three idiot dole kids would have to go to hospital, and how well do you think they'd be treated in there – especially by the night shift. And you'd probably make out better in jail. You'd get some respect* (*Sunday Mail*, 10 March 1996).

This illustrates how young people can be featured in the media but not have "access" or voice. It is difficult to imagine another section of the community being referred to in such terms without a major outcry, and it is difficult to imagine that such portrayal does not influence policy-making about young people.

Public advocates for young people, such as peak bodies and organisations which deliver services to young people, are often limited to a reactive role of commenting on policy issues defined by others. Fortunately, issues such as lowering the voting age have been picked up by the media as a result of such advocacy, in this case undertaken by the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition. This said, there is evidence that access is difficult to gain and sustain for those engaged in advocacy for young people (Youth Bureau 1994b) and that in the area of juvenile crime policy much effort is put into reacting to a regular succession of proposals, such as youth curfews, tougher sentencing, increased police powers. These proposals can be seen as attacking existing rights and protections afforded young people.

Use of the media as an authoritative source in political processes

Does the portrayal of juvenile crime in the mainstream media influence parliamentary debates on "youth issues"? Covering the same period as the Queensland Youth Bureau research reported above, Thompson (1995) examined the relationship between the media and parliamentary debate on juvenile crime. Statements and questions in the Queensland Parliament Hansard for six and a half months in 1994, covering 29 days of sittings, were examined for topics related to young people and sources cited, and the content analysed for common themes. The study found that the print media was the major media source of information and supporting evidence for statements and questions raised in parliament regarding young people. Newspaper articles were used 46 times to support statements or raise questions. The strongest theme was the connection between young people and crime, with 124 direct references to young people's association with criminal activity. Claims of there being a "crime wave" and increasing crime problems were regularly employed, and on 29 occasions references were made to the elderly as "victims" or as "living in fear" as a consequence of crime.

All the major parties in Queensland placed tougher juvenile justice laws at the centre of their 1995 election policy platforms. In a letter to the electorate, the then Premier, Wayne Goss, framed young people generally within a criminal logic.

> *We'll bring in harsher penalties for louts. And their parents will be made responsible. But to rebuild community values we also need to help young people before they go off the rails* (Goss, 23 June 1995).

In July 1996 the Coalition Government introduced the Juvenile Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 1996. In introducing the second reading of the Bill, the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice alluded to the public debate conducted through the media:

> *As promised in the 1995 election campaign, the National Liberal Coalition government has heard and is acting on the concerns of many, many Queensland people. Since late 1993 they have felt little but dismay about juvenile crime and the system's response to it* (Beanland 1996, p.1556).

This "dismay" would appear to refer to the views of "authoritative sources" reported in the mainstream media. It would be inaccurate to simply lay blame at the feet of the mainstream media, though they are clearly active participants. There is a significant link between the way young people are portrayed in the media and the way political debates about young people are framed. In both the media and in political debates, young people themselves have no voice, with advocates of young people given only a minimal voice.

The rights of young people to associate and be heard

Attention has recently turned to applying the concept of citizenship to consideration of what rights children and young people should have in Australian society (Bessant 1996). This follows a long period of interest and activity on human rights, culminating in Australia becoming a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. Bessant (1996) argues that children and young people are unfairly excluded from the category of citizen in important respects, on grounds which substantially mirror those applied to other excluded groups, such as women and Aboriginal people. These exclusions are based on spurious assumptions. Rather than being seen as "property" or as "citizens of the future", young people need to be seen as people in their own right, with inclusion of young people being a dominant policy goal. The inclusion of young people as "authoritative sources" in media reports regarding juvenile crime is one way of working towards an inclusive agenda.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as an internationally negotiated and ratified agreement, is a worthwhile point of reference for considering what rights are relevant if young people were to be included in civil, political and social life. The most explicitly relevant rights articulated in the Convention are:

> *State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child* (Article 12).
>
> *The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds ...* (Article 13).
>
> *State parties recognise the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly* (Article 15).

These rights taken together would indicate that children and young people should individually and collectively be provided with access to the mechanisms that exist in a society for information sharing, association and debate. Clearly, however, they do not have this access, nor do they have the political or economic power to alter this situation.

The right to associate is particularly important given the need of the media to employ "authoritative sources", which are usually based in an institution or organisation. It is not surprising that the media does not access young people's perspectives when young people, and here I mean young people under 18 (juveniles in the criminological sense), are legally not permitted to form their own associations, or companies. Legally, young people under 18 must be dependent on adult-managed organisations. This reflects a broader common law position where being a minor implies an immaturity of judgment, or incompetence, and that the law protects minors from the consequences of that immaturity (Vermeesch & Lingren 1995).

In most States, for example, it is not legal for young people under 18 to be on the management committees of incorporated associations. In Queensland a legislative amendment was introduced in 1995 to the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981* to make it a requirement that all members of management committees be adults. The Queensland Department of Consumer Affairs also indicates it is departmental policy that young people are not able to be full members of incorporated associations, and should be specified as junior members with no voting rights. The rationale for this is that people under the age of 18 are not able to enter into contracts other than for necessities of life. Similarly, to be a director of a company limited by guarantee it is necessary under company law to be 18 years or over (Kaplan 1995). In New South Wales the most liberal position among the States exists where there is simply a requirement that an incorporated organisation have a designated accountable "public officer" over the age of 18 years. While in all jurisdictions there is nothing to prohibit young people forming unincorporated associations, such organisations have no legal standing, and no limitations on liability. The reality is that such associations are not viable over time, if they are to be the basis of any significant level of activity. Unincorporated associations involving young people do exist, and it appears they most usually operate through the support of an adult-managed organisation such as a youth peak organisation.

Groups of young people could be nominated, who if given the legal opportunity to do so, might form associations and so gain the media status of "authoritative source". Young people in secondary school, custody, in families, using public spaces, have the capacity to form their views and, as indicated in the UN Convention, should have the opportunity to associate, express these views and have input to decisions being made about them. A critical element of this is having a legitimate voice in the media, particularly in relation to the identification and debate of policy, that is, decisions that are being made about them.

The link between having a legitimate voice in the media and citizenship is about including the stakeholders. It is vital to define and debate the structural, cultural and institutional barriers which impede young people from having legitimate and respected voice. To do so involves moving to a position where exclusion of young people from fundamental social and political rights is an unsatisfactory element of Australian society.

Clearly, the media form a discretionary area where decisions regarding content are made on a daily, pragmatic and usually culturally stereotypical basis. The new debates about citizenship have highlighted the importance of inclusion rather than exclusion (Croft & Beresford 1992). There is mounting evidence coming from research and reports of consultations with young people to suggest that young people are aware that they are represented in a very negative way by mainstream media and consider this to be a significant issue (Daniel & Cornwall 1993, Flynn 1994, Youth Bureau 1994b, 1995, 1996).

The history of increasing participation in social and political life for marginalised sections of the population has been slow and uncertain (Croft & Beresford 1992). While greater participation has been one goal of many human services which work with young people, there has been little change in young people's access to decision-making roles or positions of influence in major social institutions which shape and control their lives. Participatory schemes to include young people in government and school policy development (youth forums and councils) and in advocacy organisations have typically involved only small numbers of young people within the legal structure of adult organisations. The capacity of such processes to provide a strong and consistent point of media contact, one which satisfies the requirements of the mainstream media, is very limited.

Measures to improve the access of young people to the mainstream media can involve more than one of the following four responses.

Strategies of an educative kind could include media awards; awareness training for journalists and others who work in, or are training to work in the media; improving the availability of accurate information about young people; the further development of media outlets for young people (Youth Bureau 1994b); the support of young people to develop the skills of writing and advocating in the media; the creation of youth spokesperson positions by advocacy organisations; and the inclusion of critical analysis of the media in mainstream school education (Falk 1994).

Strategies which involve increasing the rights of young people include legislation to make it possible for young people under 18 years to form legal associations (with or without some limitations to rights and liabilities in respect of contracting), the development of a Charter of Rights for Children and Young People enshrined in legislation (National Children's and Youth Law Centre 1995; Bessant 1996); and lowering the right to vote (AYPAC 1995).

Strategies to increase the regulatory environment include extending anti-discrimination provisions to cover the vilification of young people, and the inclusion in regulations or codes of media practice certain minimum standards in relation to the reporting of issues affecting young people. There are limits to how well this can work given the diversity of media systems, the reluctance of legislators to regulate "the messenger", and the necessity to harness the discretionary processes which operate in the media to be more favourable to young people.

Strategies to increase monitoring of the media include continuing research documenting media practices, media watch and complaint strategies, and giving various Human Rights Commissions or State Children's Commissioners the power and resources to routinely investigate and make public findings on media practices in relation to reporting young people.

It is necessary that all these responses be employed in an effort to improve the highly unsatisfactory situation that currently exists. The strategic interests of political parties, police, education authorities and the media, converge around common themes of moral concern and perceived social disintegration. In relation to juvenile justice the police are key protagonists in lobbying for resources and public goodwill, as are political parties and individual politicians, the judiciary and the legal profession. Young people, marginalised from the political process, are a particularly useful target. Young people are all too easily portrayed as threats to social order, morally deficient or, at best, immature and irresponsible, in dire need of the heavy hands of surveillance and guidance. Rather than there being improvement in the rights and opportunities of young people to associate and have their views heard, there are indications that governments are eroding what rights young people currently have.

The portrayal of young people in the media tells us a great deal about the nature of relationships between young people and the social institutions that are central to their lives, and it is not good news. There is a need to challenge this portrayal of young people in our society and to move to a position where young Australians enjoy full-citizenship status (Bessant 1996; Raynor 1991, p.36).

Current approaches in the media to reporting young people reinforce images of youth as criminal. Those currently given access to the mainstream media in crime reports are the adult voices of authority. Young people need to speak, as adults do, with many voices. Critical to having these voices heard are issues surrounding the the legal and regulatory constraints on young people being able to speak and to form associations. Operating against this is a long tradition of academic and popular theories about young people which provide accounts of young people as passive, disinterested, dependent in all respects, and at a life stage inaccurately typified as one of psychological upheaval (Springhall 1983), and either appropriately conforming, or troublesome and deviant. Given the ongoing strength of these ways of viewing young people, it is not surprising their views and perspectives are not sought. The days are past when "we" can claim, with credibility, to know the interests of children and young people without hearing directly from them, through associations they call their own.

Terry Laidler*

Media portrayals of young people

WHEN WE talk about the portrayal of young people in the media, we're talking about what old people say about them. I'm using old in the very generic sense. The two producers of my radio program are fairly young by 3LO terms, both in their early thirties. Initially they started on my program when they were in their mid-twenties, but even then a lot of them are out of touch with what a lot of us would probably mean when we say "young people" because even if we describe 25-year-olds as young people we know there are a lot of other young people who aren't represented in that group.

Further, even those targeted outlets that give the best chance for young people to contribute directly to the discussion have fairly restricted opportunities for a range of young people to get involved. In the main, it would be fair to argue that most media treat "young people" as consumers rather than participants.

"The media"?

Let me make an important point: there is no one thing called "the media". It's not just a matter of semantics to say that media is a plural noun even though it's easy to believe it is a single entity. However, what we're really talking about is a whole range of organisations, institutions and people doing a whole range of different things, with very specific mediums.

I'm one of those who has serious concerns about the concentration of media ownership in Australia, and I'm actually positively involved in a few initiatives to try and stop it happening more. But despite my concerns about the concentration of media ownership, I don't picture a dark room somewhere where the magnates get together and smoke their cigars while deciding what the media will treat and what they will ignore.

There may well be many more subtle cultural influences shaping a general tendency – I'm prepared to acknowledge that. But if you want to look at the portrayal of young people in the media, don't start by assuming a conspiracy.

Take 3LO for example. It works like this: I compete day-by-day with my other colleagues.

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* Terry Laidler is a Melbourne-based commentator for the ABC Radio 3LO. This chapter is the text of his presentation, Media Portrayals of Young People, to the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria on 8 May 1996. It first appeared in *YACVic Bits* June 1996 and is reprinted with permission.

I want stories before the Peter Couchman program gets them. I don't want Doug Aiton's program to trump me. It's not that we don't get on well – we happen to be mates as well as colleagues. But beyond that, the daily dynamic is one of real and healthy competition.

Nor do we work day-by-day under very direct editorial control (and that's true even in commercial media). You certainly work within a set of parameters, sometimes in the form of a written, formal program brief, sometimes a less formal understanding of the general structuring and targeting of the outlet. You have a rough sense of when you step over the line.

Nor is stepping over the line the end of things. You know that if you do, you'll have to fight to justify what you have done in terms of the program brief or the less formal understanding of the purpose.

But no-one comes to me or my producers day-by-day and says you must do this or that type of story, or anything like that. I work with a creative, innovative and generally hard working bunch of people, ordinary human beings, making judgments about what is of interest in the public discourse. Don't assume that the bulk of us who work in the media industries are either under such direct editorial pressure or so incompetent that we don't want to do the best job that we can.

Editorial judgment

A lot of the material that finally gets media coverage is fed to journalists and program makers well in advance through the medium of PR machines and general press releases, listeners letters and that sort of thing. When we arrive for the day's work, the first thing that confronts us is a huge pile of letters, faxes and press releases that have come in.

Again, there is no conspiracy in the way we deal with this mass of material: if I could take the example of my own program, when we pick this pile up each day we are looking to plan about two-thirds of the structured part of the program well ahead (that is, days or weeks). We prepare the other third of the program "hot" each day from news that "hits you in the face" in the press, other media, wire services, etc.

We scan each of the letters, press releases and faxes and, to be very frank, if the headline is no good it gets thrown in the rubbish bin. If the headline is good, then the first paragraph gets read: if by the end of the first paragraph there is no story starting to shape in our mind or no immediate talent jumping off the page at us, then it's competing with a lot of other bits of paper that will do exactly that. Believe it or not, some of us in the media have social consciences. Some of us even dig through the pile and see if there is an "ought to do" story in there, but not everyone does. There is indeed variation in how people shape their editorial judgment, from pure and sheer commercial motives, right through to some refinement of social conscience. But unless the material is in there, unless a story has "got legs" in its own right, it probably won't get a run, simply because of the many other stories that do.

There are lots of people who work in the media who would be prepared to help get issues of social concern run, but I think sometimes there's this sense in various areas of social concern that the media "owe us a bit of space".

Well yeah! We might owe Yooralla a bit of space but we also owe it to domestic violence, and the issue of how we promote AIDS education in our community deserves a bit too, as does tenants' rights, young people and suicide, road safety, etc. Good causes line up alongside many other good causes, and unless the story jumps off the page or you are going to provide talent (as we call it in the trade) that will instantly grab us, you are probably up against a bit of a barrier.

The other thing I should say is that like many businesses, the media work through networking. Looking around here today, I can see half a dozen faces of people who if they rang me and said, "Terry, I've got a story", would get a hearing. They'd have to have a story but not necessarily a "show stopper". Because we've met somewhere else and chatted and there is some relationship established, I would at least say, "I'll hear this one out".

I think this impinges on why young people themselves don't get broadcast and print space even if their issues do. They're networks are "in development"!

Perhaps, there is an issue of advocacy there. Perhaps it's important for people who do exercise some advocacy function to use the networks that they have developed to start to find some space for young people themselves in the media.

As somebody working on the inside, I feel as powerless as most people at different stages in effecting real social change. This may seem surprising to people outside the industry because we do operate in a very privileged part of the social discourse. By the same token, the power we have is often overstated.

We certainly have the ability to put things on the agenda, and to maintain them on the agenda. But beyond that don't be over optimistic about what the media can do. I get a bit frustrated sometimes when I hear about the "power of the media" because I know it's not like that from the inside. There is nothing I can do on radio tomorrow to radically change the situation of young people in our society. It doesn't work that way, and I've got to balance that capacity to keep things on the agenda against other issues.

Remember the nine blokes who were burnt to death in a fire at Kew Cottages? We would have followed that story in a way that was editorially responsible. It wouldn't have been done to death each night. We would have taken different angles on it, heard different voices about it. We would have tried to keep the discussion alive over a period two or three weeks from a genuine sense of social concern, ultimately hoping to get a minister or someone like that to come on the program to say, "Well, I'll have a look at these issues". That's the agenda setting thing as far as it goes.

Then Port Arthur happened and the Kew Cottages story was swept from sight. So even with the capacity to set the agenda, it's not as though, the agenda is entirely within the media's own control. Sometimes it takes on a life of its own.

And even if there is a level of public interest, or support for what you're trying to put on the agenda, you can still end up "running a story into the ground" or sometimes "short-circuiting" it when people have a lot more interest than you think it's really worth. The judgment is "fine" and mistakes are made even where there is good will.

I think that's what happened with the Paxton case a bit. Some of my colleagues in the media did atrocious things in the coverage of that story. I think where it eventually went was even beyond their control, that they had opened up something without the structure it needed to lead to informed discussion. And so that's exactly what they got: ill-informed discussion.

Having spent a long time setting some context, I'm only going to say a few brief things directly about the portrayal of young people in the media. First, I think that the various media are so dominated by people in our age-group that no matter how open-minded and empathic and sincere they may be, we are almost always basically telling someone else's story, a young person's story. Your invitation to me to be here today actually got me thinking about my own program: the number of people between 12 and 25 that we have had on my program is really very minuscule. By and large we tell the story from "outside" rather than having developed structures to allow young people to tell their stories themselves.

Second, perhaps surprisingly given that we are coming at it from "outside", I would argue that what you see when the media tries to tell stories of young people is generally sympathetic and understanding, especially when compared with other issues also told from "outside" that get much rougher treatment. Nevertheless, it could hardly be disputed that it would be far better if it were informed by young people themselves.

Third, I'd argue that the structural issues are paramount. That is, we really ought to be pressuring organisations like the ABC, commercial outlets and the government itself to open up opportunities for the media to be the media of young people rather than just the media for or about them. Lots of young people listen to Fox FM, MMM, TTFM, JJJ but very few young people (in the sense we are talking about) work at these outlets.

This, I think, is what HITZ FM (public broadcast youth radio) hit on. Young people were working with each other to make sure they were part of the social discourse, rather than having other people talking about them, and we oldies got a bit scared that it worked so well. Commercial radio stations got worried when in a couple of ratings results the "other FM" category had suddenly leapt through the roof. The only thing that had changed was that HITZ had come on air in a test broadcast. They saw their market being swallowed but they haven't changed much as a result. The pressure that commercial music outlets and radio stations have been able to bring to bear to stop the government permanently licensing an undertaking like that is something that should be countered. Lots of us, including myself, backed off too easily on that and let them have their way. What we actually had was a sudden outburst of popular culture saying something significant is happening here! Perhaps it's not only the media that don't listen to young people enough.

Peter Rendell

Youth and crime in television news bulletins

A STUDY BY the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (1990, p.240) found that most people agreed with the statement that "news programs show the world as it really is". Regular surveys of Australia-wide samples since the early 1980s indicate television has maintained a clear lead as the medium perceived as the best source of accurate and reliable news (Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations 1992). Yet in media studies it is frequently claimed that the media present a distorted view of the world (Bonney & Wilson 1983; Windschuttle 1988). Equally there is a widespread view in youth studies that the media over-represents or misrepresents the extent and seriousness of delinquency and criminal behaviours by young people (O'Connor 1993; Tait, Kendall & Carpenter 1995). These claims have become routine but the empirical evidence to support these claims is limited. This chapter examines such claims regarding representations of young people and crime in television news by reporting on a survey of the television news portrayals of youth and crime. Television news is of interest because although it is the medium considered to be the most credible by many people, it has considerable potential to present a distorted view of the world. The potential for distorted views is due in part to the brevity of news reports, the focus on items with visual images, and the consequential high degree of selection in the material presented (Windschuttle 1988).

A survey of 82 television news bulletins was conducted to provide a snapshot of the patterns of presentation of youth and crime. This snapshot was given a reality check by testing the findings of the survey of television news against the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report of the 1995 national crime statistics (McLennan 1996). The reality tests, reported in this chapter, compared the portrayals of crime victims in television news with patterns of crime victims in the 1995 crime statistics. The ABS report of the 1995 crime statistics details crime in terms of the number of victims reported to police in Australia nationally, for various types of crimes, with breakdown according to age of victim (McLennan 1996). The findings from the survey of television news programs and the reality tests applied are reported in four sections.

The first section, general patterns of television news, examines the overall patterns of crime segments and youth segments in television news programs. This section shows three significant patterns: crime was a consistent and regular component of television news; youth were implicated in a substantial proportion of crime segments; and youth were rarely presented in non-crime news segments. The second section, frequency of victims for different categories of crime, focuses on the different types of crime that appeared on television news programs. The frequency of television news segments reporting various categories of crime was compared with the frequency of crime occurrences as documented in the 1995 ABS national crime statistics (McLennan 1996). Crime was a substantial component of television news but only a small proportion of crimes received television news coverage.

The third section, focuses on age-related patterns of crime victims. Young people represented a third of the victims of serious crime in the 1995 ABS crime statistics but were neglected as victims in television news bulletins. In contrast, the elderly and children were over-represented as crime victims. The fourth section of the television news survey findings, presentation of crime suspects in television news, examines television news presentations of suspects and/or perpetrators of crimes. This section also compares the age-related pattern of crime suspects and victims in television news. Adults were represented as both crime victims and crime suspects. Youth, neglected as crime victims, featured as crime suspects. The elderly and children were over-represented as crime victims, but were overlooked as crime suspects.

Overview of the survey of television news

A total of 82 evening news bulletins was surveyed. All segments which included youth and all crime-related segments were identified and analysed. There were totals of 48 news segments involving youth and 189 news segments involving crime. Table 1 presents an overview of the

Table 1: Overview of survey

	Television channel				
	Two	*Seven*	*Nine*	*Ten*	*All*
News bulletins surveyed					
Time of bulletin	7 pm	6 pm	6 pm	5 pm	
Length of bulletin (mins)	30	30	30	60	
Duration of news per bulletin (mins)	22	15	15	28.5	
Number of bulletins surveyed	17	23	22	20	82
Crime news segments					
Total number of segments	24	50	50	65	189
Mean number segments per bulletin	1.41	2.17	2.27	3.25	2.30
Mean duration each segment (secs)	80.25	65.88	75.32	82.18	75.81
Per cent of the total time of news	8.58	15.91	19.02	15.62	14.64
Youth news segments					
Total number of segments	4	14	11	19	48
Mean number segments per bulletin	0.24	0.61	0.50	0.95	0.59
Mean duration each segment (secs)	92.00	80.93	93.55	89.95	88.31
Per cent of the total time of news	1.64	5.47	5.20	5.00	4.33
Total number of *youth crime* segments	3	11	8	13	35
Total number of *youth non-crime* segments	1	3	3	6	13

person but the term youth was used in the report of a court case for an adult offender. The report claimed the judge gave a lenient sentence because the offender had "spent much of (his) youth in foster care". The term youth was rarely used in news reports that were not crime-related. Over the entire period of the survey, only four news segments not reporting crime used the term youth. The four instances were reports on youth unemployment. One other news report on unemployment figures used the term "teenagers" or "young people", but did not use the term "youth". This report however was a good news story with the emphasis on the drop in unemployment: "welcome news ... hefty drop in unemployment rate ... lowest rate in five years".

The term "youth" was used largely to describe criminal suspects. Terms describing other specific age-groups, like child, adult, man and woman, were used in a variety of reports in television. Limiting the use of the term youth, almost exclusively to reports of criminal suspects and negative stories of unemployment firmly links the term to criminality and a lack of success in life. Youth becomes a pejorative term that is synonymous with the juvenile criminal or unemployed.

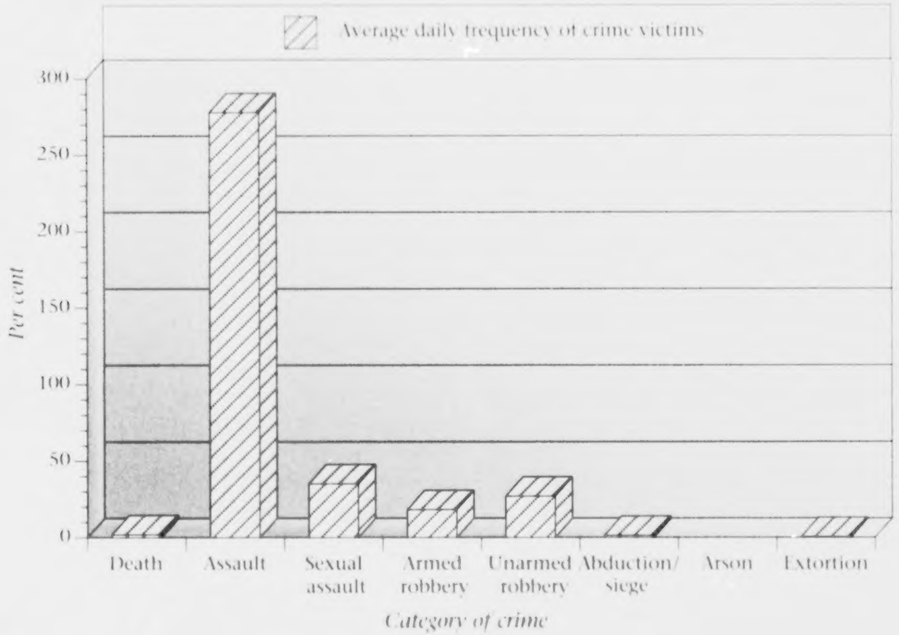
Frequency of victims for different categories of crime

This section reports the way different categories of crime were reported in television news programs. The frequency of news segments reporting various categories of crime is compared with the frequency of crime occurrences in the ABS report of the 1995 national crime statistics (McLennan 1996).

The figures for the 1995 ABS crime statistics were calculated using the numbers reported for the serious crime categories in the ABS report (McLennan 1996). The crime categories used in this study (see Figures 2 & 3) follow those used in the ABS report with the following modifications. Some categories are grouped together. The ABS categories of "murder", "manslaughter" and "driving causing death" (culpable driving) are classified as death. The ABS categories of "assault" and "attempted murder" were grouped together as assault. Two ABS categories are not included: "motor vehicle theft" and "unlawful entry" (burglary). In these categories the reported victim refers not to an individual but to the motor vehicle and premises respectively. In addition, these were minor crimes that were not focused on in the television news bulletins. Arson, was not a crime category in the ABS report, but it was included in Figures 2 and 3, because there were several television news segments reporting arson with a focus on a victim.

Crime reports that included victims were a regular component of the news bulletins surveyed, but the number of crimes covered by television news programs was a very small proportion of the total number of crimes reported to police in Australia. Over the period of the survey there was a total of 101 news segments that included some reports of crime victims – an average of 1.2 crime segments featuring victim/s for each news bulletin. The average daily frequency of crime victims in Australia for various serious crime categories was determined from the 1995 ABS crime statistics (see Figure 2). For the serious crime categories (in Figure 2) there was on average 361.7 crime victims a day reported to police in 1995 compared to about one or maybe two news segments with a crime victim in each daily evening news bulletin. This demonstrates that television news is very selective in the reporting of crime victims. There were about 300 serious crime victims for every crime segment on television news featuring a victim. There were similar high numbers of crime victims for most crime categories. In particular, with assault there were nearly 700 crime victims for every news segment

Figure 2: Average daily frequency of crime victims in Australia, calculated from the 1995 ABS crime statistics (McLennan 1996)

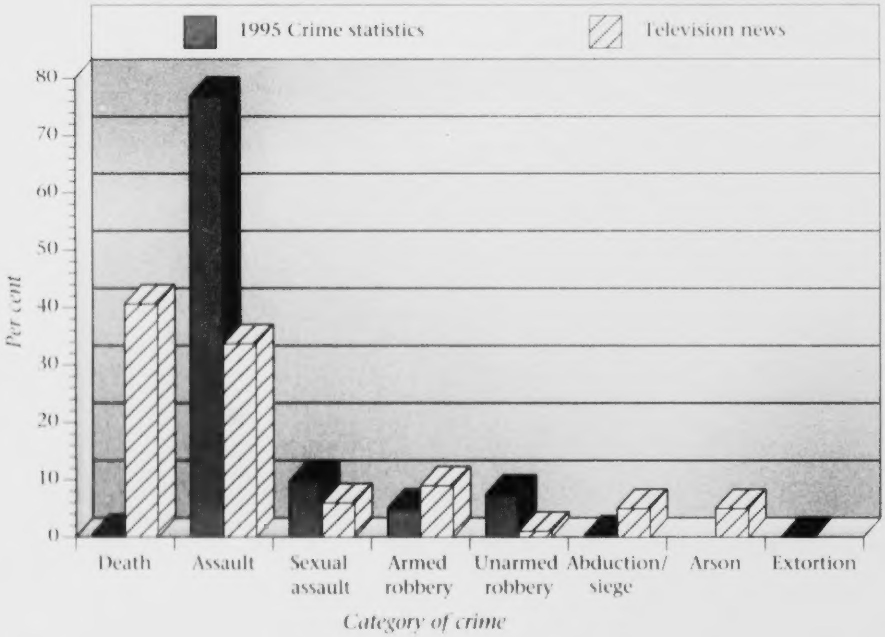


reporting an assault victim. One exception was death where television news was not so selective with about three or four deaths for each crime news segment with a death victim. This relates to the emphasis in television news on very serious crimes, such as crime-related death, taken up in the next section of this chapter.

There are obviously many more crimes with victims reported to police than are reported in the television news bulletins. However, the accuracy of the claim that there were about 300 serious crime victims for every television crime segment requires some comment. The television news crime segments were reporting crime from different parts of Australia but most crimes reported occurred in the State from which the news was broadcast. In addition, each crime segment with a victim was only counted once even if, as frequently occurred, there was more than one victim for the particular crime incident. The figure of 300 may be an underestimate as television news does not just report a crime victim once, often a particular crime incident involving a victim will be reported over several different evening news bulletins.

The victims of very serious crime, such as death, were over-represented in television news reports relative to other less serious crime. Figure 3 shows for each crime category the percentage of crime news segments with a victim and the percentage of crime victims according to the 1995 ABS crime statistics. Death was a small proportion of the crime victims, less than 1%, but about 40% of crime news segments in television news bulletins. It seems that television prefers the dramatic and more devastating crimes. In the crime statistics there were more victims of unarmed robbery than victims of armed robbery. In the television news bulletins segments concerning a

Figure 3: Percentage of victims for various types of serious crime in 1995 ABS crime statistics (McLennan 1996) compared to percentage of segments in television news with a crime victim



crime victim, about 10% were victims of armed robbery and about 1% unarmed robbery. The one news segment with a robbery victim was a Christmas Day report on the theft of Rudolf the red-nosed reindeer from a Christmas display in a domestic garden. The focus on dramatic or devastating crimes in news bulletins is further evident in reports of unarmed robberies without a victim. Nine out of eleven of the news segments reporting an unarmed robbery were all "ram-raids", robberies where entry to a shop after hours has been gained by driving a motor vehicle into it. The segments typically involved footage of very damaged shop fronts.

Age-related patterns of crime victims

This section focuses on age-related patterns of crime victims in television news and compares these patterns with the representation of crime victims in the ABS report of the 1995 national crime statistics (McLennan 1996). The striking feature of the age-related pattern of crime victims is the finding that television news has almost ignored crime victims in the age-groups 15 to 24 years and over-represented child and elderly crime victims. Figure 4 shows the age-group pattern of crime victims as reported by 1995 ABS crime statistics compared to the reports in television news. The youth age-group in the ABS statistics represents just over a third of crime victims. In the television survey there were no 15- to 19-year-old crime victims and only a few 20- to 24-year-olds. In the ABS statistics, the age-groups 15 to 19 years and 20 to 24 years represent 17% and 18% of crime victims, and yet the percentage of television news segments with crime victims in these age-groups was 0% and 5% respectively.

The disparity between the television news' reporting of youth in relation to other age-groups is highlighted with an examination of the crime categories of assault and death (see Figure 4). Youth were virtually absent in television reports of crime victims for the categories of assault and death but represented 26.6% and 35.5% of the victims in the 1995 ABS crime statistics for death and assault respectively. In these categories, the ABS figures are clear on the definition of victim: the person assaulted or killed is the victim. In some other categories the victim is not so clear, such as robbery, where most States only report the financial victim not the trauma victim. About 5% of crime-related death victims are in the zero to nine years age-group, yet about half the television segments involving a crime-related death had a victim in the zero to nine years age-group. Children under 15 years dominated the news segments as victims of crime resulting in death; they were the victims in about 70% of crime death segments. In contrast children under 15 years represented about 6% of the crime-related death victims. The young children were also over-represented as assault victims in the television news: about 12% of news segments but about 2% of crime victims. The elderly represent about 1% of assault victims, yet about 18% of the television news segments reporting assault victims had elderly victims. The elderly were over-represented as victims for the crime of assault but not death. There were no elderly victims of a crime-related death yet the elderly represent about 8% of the crime-related deaths in 1995.

The television news reports of crime victims specified the ages for most age-groups except the adult age-group. The crime victims with age not specified appeared to be all adults except for two instances – age was not specified for one youth and one elderly victim. These adult crime victims with age unspecified were referred to as man or woman. The contrast between adults and other age-groups in age identification of crime victims in television news was most striking. Interestingly, age was specified for all children and nearly all the elderly victims but age was not specified for most adult victims. This is taken up in the next section of this chapter.

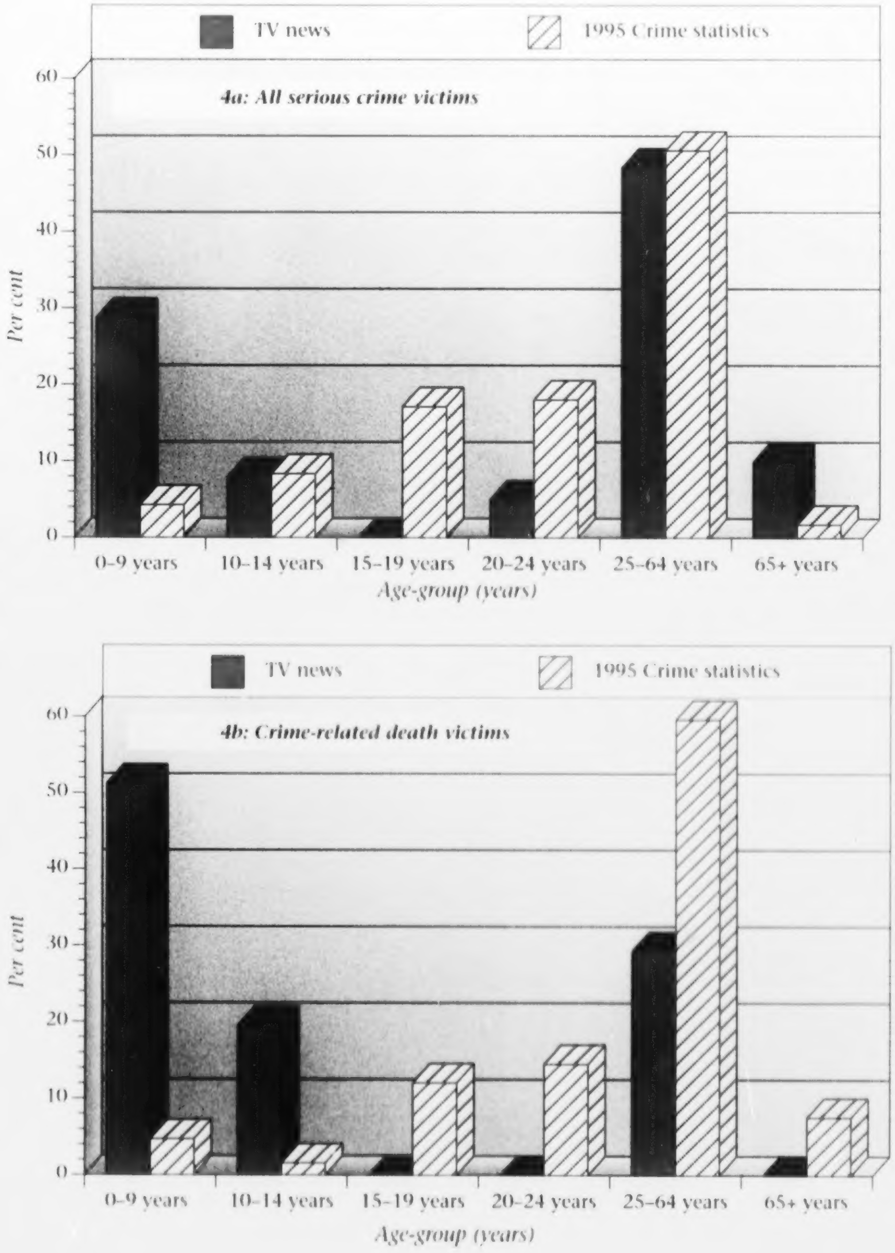
Television seems to ignore young people as victims of crime, and over-emphasises the categories of child and the elderly as victims. This downplays the risk of being a victim of crime for youth and overplays the risk of being a victim for children and the elderly. This also has the potential of promoting moral panics rather than representing reality. Presumably children and older adults are seen as more vulnerable and crimes against them may be given prominence due to the sympathy they attract when portrayed as victims. Interestingly, most of the crime victims in the zero to nine years age-group were infants, evoking even more public sympathy than older children. Commercial television news bulletins are competing to attract the largest audiences which means television news may be playing to viewers' fears as well as their sympathies. The presentation of elderly victims further contributes to moral panics by giving the message that the elderly are becoming increasingly vulnerable to serious and frightening crimes. Many of the elderly were victims of what was described as home attacks, assault by an unknown intruder to their homes. In a number of the reports, a police officer or some other authority figure was quoted as stating that crimes directed at the elderly were increasing and that elderly should be cautious.

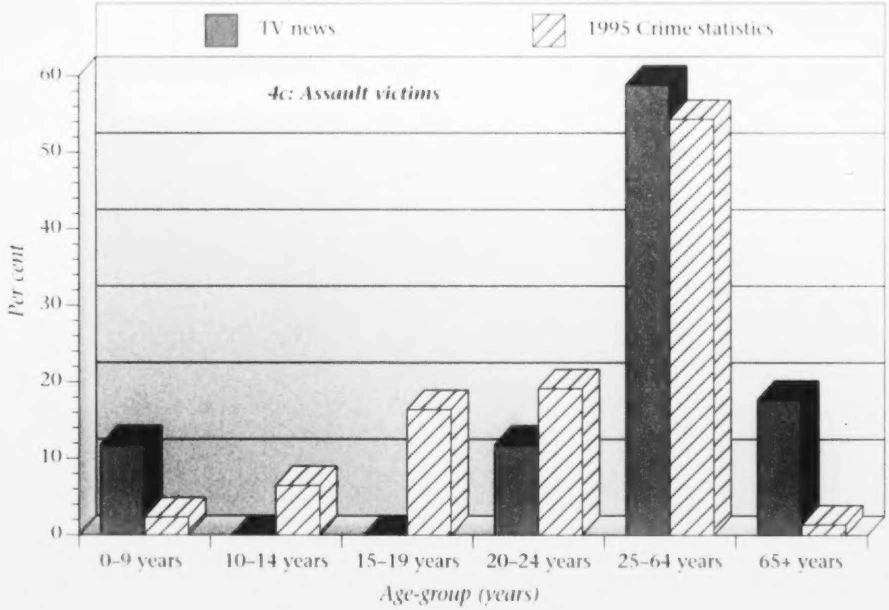
Presentation of crime suspects in television news

This section focuses on the patterns of crime suspects in television news and compares the patterns with the presentation of crime victims in television news.

A key feature of the findings of this research was the different age-related patterns for crime suspects and crime victims in television news. Adults were represented as both suspects and

Figure 4: ***Age-related pattern for serious crime victims in 1995 ABS crime statistics (McLennan 1996) compared to age-related pattern for segments in television news with a crime victim***





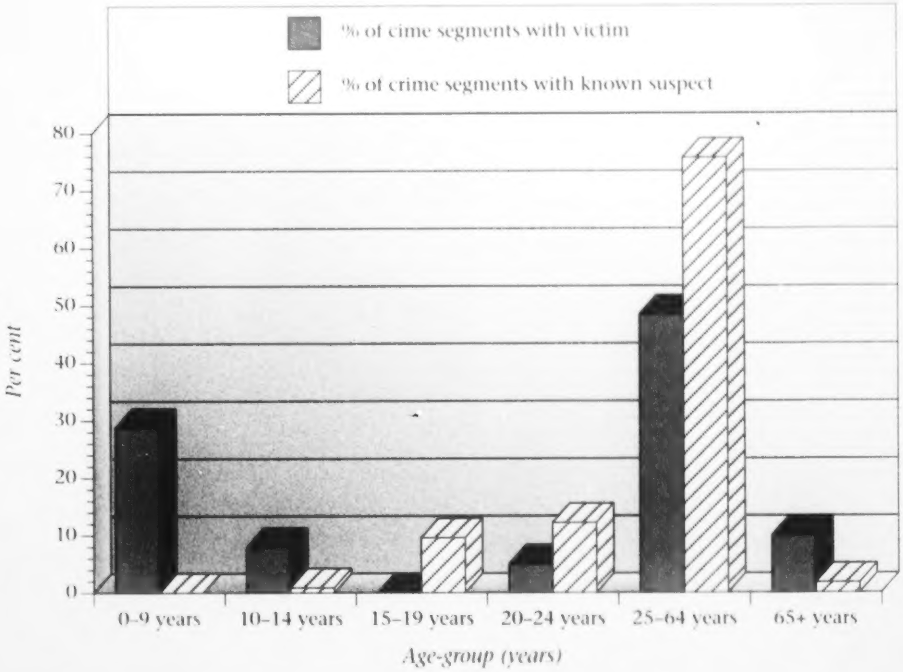
victims in television news reports of crimes. However, the representation pattern of crime suspects for other groups was the reverse of the pattern for crime victims. Youth were represented as crime suspects in television news reports but neglected as crime victims. In contrast, children and the elderly were overlooked as crime suspects but over-represented as crime victims. Figure 5 compares the age-related patterns in the frequency of crime segments with victims and known suspects. Suspects is the term used to describe the alleged perpetrator of a crime or the person charged with a criminal offence. Young people were virtually absent in television presentations of crime victims but represented about 20% of the known crime suspects reported in television news. The elderly represented almost 10% of victims but comprised less than 2% of the suspects in terms of the number of crime segments with victims and suspects respectively.

Most of the crime suspects in the television news were adults or youth. There were between three and four times as many adult suspects as youth suspects but, of course, the adult range covered four decades while the youth age range covered one decade. Youth were not over-represented as suspects relative to adults, but television news did seem to over-emphasise youth as criminal suspects. Young people unlike adults, were absent as crime victims and neglected in non-crime news stories.

The pattern of age identification of known suspects in television reports of crime was similar to the pattern with crime victims in television reports. In all but one instance, age was specified for known suspects in the child, youth and elderly age-groups. The strongest focus on age identification of crime suspects and crime victims is for the child, youth and elderly age-groups. Interestingly, it is these age-groups where the frequency of presentation in television reports of crime is most distorted.

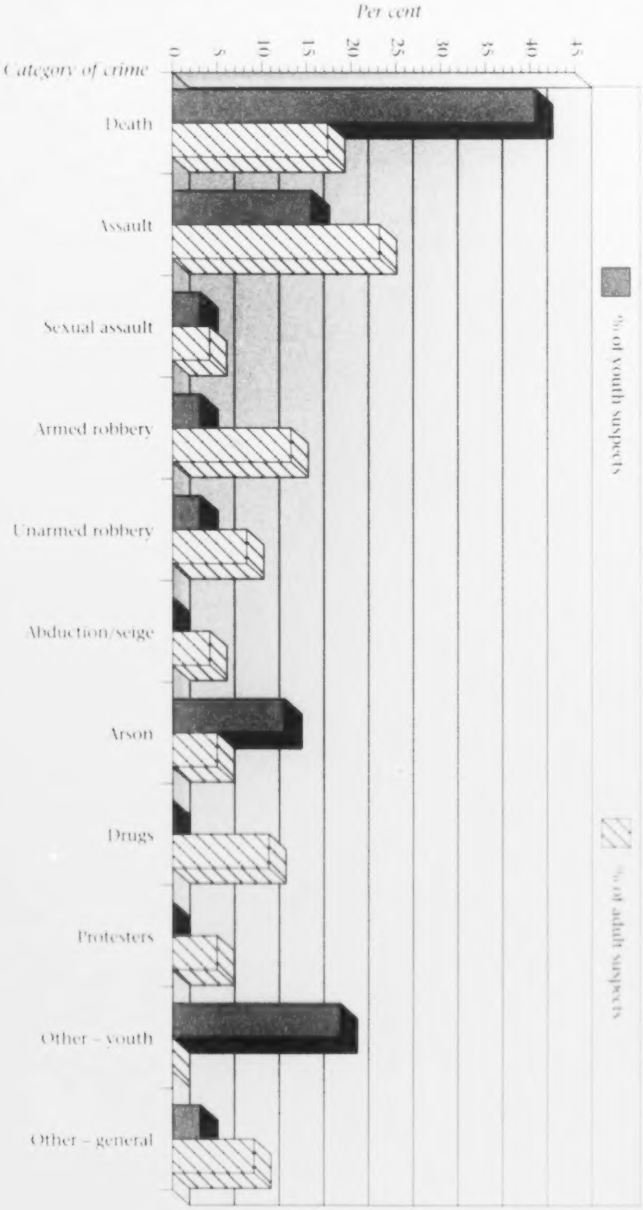
The breakdown of suspects according to crime category and the age-groups youth and adult

Figure 5: Comparison of the age-related patterns for crime victims and crime suspects in television news



is shown in Figure 6. The general range of crimes types is similar with one or two notable exceptions. At all ages a substantial proportion of the crime segments involved suspects (about 20%) for crime-related death, but an even larger proportion of youth crime suspects (about 40%) were implicated in crime-related death. About 20% of the crime segments with a youth suspect were for crimes that were only reported with youth suspects. These were described as joy riding (resulting in suspect's death), vandalism, train surfing and loutish behaviour. As noted earlier, it seems the television news focuses on reporting crimes that are popularly perceived as the most dramatic, tragic and devastating. The findings reflect the tendency of television to report devastating crimes, and this is particularly apparent in the representations of youth as suspects in crimes. Most of the crime segments with youth suspects were for crime relating to death, assault or arson. The one exception was the 20% of crime segments with youth suspects that reported specific youth crimes. Arson was not a specific crime category in the 1995 ABS crime victim statistics, but it represented about 6% of the crime segments in television. A larger proportion of youth suspects were arsonists compared to the proportion of suspected adult arsonists. The television reports of arson typically involved film of considerable destruction: one incident was of the burning of a large and historic church. The church-burning incident was typical in that it focused on the extent and tragic nature of the destruction and on the distress it caused. Over-representing young people as suspects for these serious and tragic crimes clearly associates the youth age-group with social distress, violence and crime.

Figure 6: Comparison of the presentation of youth and adult crime suspects in television news according to the different categories of crime



A key feature of the findings was that most television news segments involving young people were reporting crime. Young people were involved in about a fifth of the crime segments. In addition, young people were not presented in a very positive light in the few youth-oriented segments that did not report a crime; they were mostly reports of youth unemployment or the risks of young people driving cars. The term "youth" was used in just under half of the crime segments on television news involving youth but was rarely used in news segments not reporting crime. Television news presents young people largely as criminals or social problems and the term "youth" was exclusively used as a pejorative term.

The survey of 82 evening television news bulletins demonstrated that crime is a consistent feature in television news. Commercial news regularly included two or three crime segments in each bulletin but crime was less prominent in the ABC news. While all news media are selective, the survey confirmed the degree of selectivity in television news. It was estimated there were about 300 serious crime victims for every crime segment on television news with a victim. Television was even more selective for assault victims but was much less selective in reporting crime-related death victims. Tragic and devastating crimes were over-represented in the television news bulletins. Death crime victims were a very small proportion of the serious crime victims reported in the 1995 ABS national crime statistics but they represented almost half of the television news crime segments where crimes resulted in death.

Television news seems to ignore youth as crime victims and focus on what seem to be identified as more vulnerable age-groups – children and elderly. This is despite the fact the young and elderly represent a relatively small proportion of crime victims in 1995 and youth represent a relatively large proportion. During the period of the television news survey, there were no crime victims with age specified in the 15 to 19 age-group and only few in the 20 to 24 years age-group. In contrast, these age-groups represent over a third of the crime victims reported to police in 1995. The contrast is also stark in the crime categories of death and assault. Youth crime victims in the death and assault categories were virtually absent from the television news despite the fact 15- to 24-year-olds constituted a relatively high proportion, about a third, of death and assault victims. This pattern is reversed for children with the categories of death and assault. Children, those aged under 15 years, were a very small proportion of the crime-related death victims in 1995, yet there was a child victim in nearly three quarters of the television news segments involving a crime-related death victim. The elderly, were over-represented as crime victims of assault but not for death. The elderly were about 1% of assault victims in 1995, yet they were the victims in almost a fifth of television segments involving an assault victim.

Television may be ignoring youth as victims of crime, but they were clearly represented as perpetrators of crimes, suspects, alleged, charged or convicted. The pattern was the reverse for children and the elderly who were over-represented as victims but overlooked as crime perpetrators. Young people did not appear to be over-represented as suspects, relative to adults, but the presentations of youth identified them as perpetrators of crime and violence. In terms of the various crime categories, youth differed from adults in the pattern of presentations. Young people compared to adults, were more often the suspects of the serious crimes of death, assault and arson than less serious crimes. In addition, about one-fifth of the crime segments with a youth suspect were for crimes in which only young people were ever reported as suspects. These were vandalism, loutish behaviour, train surfing and death by "truck joy-ride". The pattern of presentation of crime in television news gives the message that youth, unlike other age-groups, are criminally inclined, violent and socially disruptive.

The featuring of crime in television news, gives a general impression that crime, particularly serious crime, is rife. In addition, television news presents a distorted view of reality because of the degree of selection of crimes that are reported. The relationship between young people and crime is particularly distorted.

Most people believe television news simply reflects the real world (Australian Broadcasting Tribunal 1990), so the findings of this study suggest most viewers of television news are likely to: seriously underestimate the risk of youth being crime victims; overestimate youth's role as perpetrators of crime in general and serious crime in particular; overestimate the likelihood of serious crime; substantially overstate the risk of being a victim of crime for both children and the elderly, particularly serious crime; and overlook the elderly as perpetrators of crime. The perceptions of young people held by viewers of television news are likely to be bleak.

"Youth" is a term rarely heard in television news programs except in crime reports. Young people are presented frequently as crime suspects, but hardly ever as crime victims. Television news has failed the reality test applied. The frequency of presentations and nature of television reports involving young people and crime is distorted when compared to the ABS crime statistics for 1995. Furthermore, the manner of presentation promotes the view that youth are responsible for crime, and the other age-groups, particularly children and elderly, are vulnerable as victims of crime.

Chris Atmore

Rethinking moral panic and child abuse for 2000

AS STATED IN earlier chapters, the concept of moral panic has a long history of application to youth issues. The classic analysis of moral panic is Stanley Cohen's 1972 study of British responses to the mods and rockers phenomenon of the 1960s, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. A moral panic is understood by critics like Cohen as an unreasonable and unnecessary response from the mass media, politicians and, to some extent at least, the general public. It often involves the creation of certain individuals or groups as "folk devils" – generally already marginalised figures whom it is easy to target as the source of the problem.

Issues labelled as moral panics have included drug use, music (from rock and roll to heavy metal and rap), satanism and cults, concerns about violence and horror in entertainment media. As those examples suggest, moral panics tend to revolve around images of the rebellious, uncontrollable or threatened child or young person, and are often also linked to themes of sexuality.

Academics using a moral panic explanation tend to take the side of the youth involved. They offer a more reasonable and generally low-risk assessment of the actual threat to or from the individuals concerned, and to society in general. Moral panic theorists often espouse tolerant, if not broadly "progressive", views of the issue. They argue that young people are capable of making their own choices, at least to some extent, and that they should be entitled to their own forms of cultural expression and activity, even if these are unpopular with adults. The focus of these studies is therefore not on accepting the panic at face value, but rather on what particular interests might be served through having panic claims taken seriously by politicians, the media, and other influential sectors of society.

Child abuse and moral panic theories

Until recently, the issue of child abuse was not generally explained using a moral panic framework. However, some work has criticised popular constructions of "the homosexual" as the archetypal child molester, using the notion of "folk devil". This approach generally focuses on gay men, wrongly equated with paedophiles and subject to periods of "witch hunts" (McIntosh 1988; Weeks 1981). The panic is argued to be a "safe" one for conservative forces, because it allows the society to rally around already disliked, if not despised, figures. The panic therefore fails to challenge the basic values and practices of "normal men" – the overwhelming heterosexual majority of child sexual abusers – and the societal values which often allow their behaviour to go undetected or unpunished.

However, in recent academic work on child abuse, the moral panic explanation has been applied much more centrally (Best 1990, 1994; Richardson 1994; Richardson et al. 1991; Jenkins 1992). These newer researchers are particularly sceptical about current claims, especially in the United States, of wide-scale child abuse by satanic cults, and arguments that often evidence of this surfaces only when adults, through therapy, recover their repressed memories of such experiences. Sociologists like Joel Best, and James Richardson, also express doubt as to whether other, less controversial types of sexual assaults on children are really as common and as serious a threat to society as it is often claimed. Instead, they ask why there is at present such a huge public focus on threats to children, and particularly on sexual abuse.

These critics in many ways share the progressive approach of the earlier researchers on youth and moral panics. They draw on a liberal tradition of sociology which defends the "underdog" and commonly "deviantised" ways of life (Becker 1967). Hence researchers oppose the "commonsense" that contributes to moral panics because it is often extremely politically conservative. For example, they argue that in the present US climate, calls for government clampdowns on rock music lyrics are allied to an increasingly powerful Christian fundamentalism. Similarly, these moral panic theorists also oppose the persecution of unpopular, non-Christian or unorthodox religious minorities such as the Moonies, and the easy recourse to scaremongering about them as cults.

According to this sociological view, much of the social problem of child sexual abuse as it appears in the public eye is better understood as a panic constructed by two major groups of "claims-makers": the Christian Right, and feminists. Echoing some of Cohen's and the "gay scapegoat" critiques, the public is said to be distracted by witch hunts of suspected abusers from the "real" and "more difficult" issues of poverty and other forms of structural inequality (Best 1990; Jenkins 1992).

It seems very likely that not all claims about child sexual abuse are true, and that there are injustices and misuses of authority accompanying interventions into cases of suspected abuse, just as there are different kinds of oppression associated with inaction. Nevertheless, to acknowledge these issues need not mean subscribing to the way these writers are using a moral panic framework. While their work makes some very interesting points about the current climate, there are serious problems with their stance that child sexual abuse is "overrated" as an issue for social concern, and with some of their associated arguments.

American imperialism?

Most of the new work originates from, and concentrates on United States society. However, the researchers make general claims and warnings about the spread of the child abuse panic to other countries. For instance:

> *The development of a virulent antisatanist movement in the US has, as one of its consequences, led directly to the spread of the concern to other countries receptive to ideas from the US and culturally attuned to American society. This represents a form of cultural diffusion of an American derived moral panic and hysteria that should give pause for thought to citizens of the US and other societies which are receptive to this American based phenomenon* (Richardson 1994, p.19).

This explanation is based on several contentious assumptions. It subscribes to a "cultural imperialism thesis" which is disputed by many cultural critics (e.g. Lealand 1988; Bell & Bell

1993). In its simplistic form, this thesis assumes that a cultural product (like a moral panic) flows from United States sources, and is destined to be exported to the rest of the West along with McDonalds and Coca-Cola. However, while there is no doubt that the American influence on mass "media-ted" world affairs is strong, it may not be simply a question of passive Australian receptivity to "cultural diffusion", any more than it can be unproblematically argued that the way Australians play and watch basketball is just a copying of Americans (only not as good as "the real thing").

Ironically then, the American imperialism argument as it is used here fails to consider the uniqueness of non-American cultures, even if its exponents might see it as a benevolent variant for their particular project. Societies like Australia do have important similarities to the United States, but also require study on their own terms – the influence of the Christian Right being just one important difference.

The image of the passive nation-as-audience – as gullible couch potato writ large – is also problematic for other reasons. It contradicts both the "underdog sociology" and the "youth and moral panic" traditions. As outlined earlier, both of these fields tend to take a cautious view of any direct, one-way relationship between text and audience – for example, on the question of the relationship between television violence and "real life" (e.g. Langer 1995), or in terms of dispelling conservative notions about religious "cults" as automatically dangerous sites for the indoctrination of youth.

Similarly, in their own work on satanism scares, academics like Richardson et al. (1991) have some sympathy for would-be "satanists" and metal fans as relatively benign subcultures, and for "legend trippers" (usually adolescents who go on excursions to "haunted" or "satanic" sites, but who are generally not regarded by these researchers to be either "genuine" satanists or "genuine" believers in the existence of satanists, but rather are seen as thrill-seekers). Why then is the relationship between audience and text complex for a "satanist", but apparently not for an "antisatanist"?

Child abuse at the end of the millennium

Notwithstanding these kinds of criticisms, the newer moral panic work does make some important and useful points. In particular, Joel Best's *Threatened Children* (1990) offers some interesting analysis of the hold representations of child abuse currently have on the (particularly American) popular imagination. Children are symbolic bearers of the future, endlessly depicted as seeds who will grow into adults if nurtured properly, and as repositories for adults of a lost innocence. Most obviously, children get represented as our only hope for generational continuity – perhaps the last thread to cling to, and a thread envisaged as in peril, in a (United States) culture where a substantial minority believe in the likelihood of some sort of apocalypse before the year 2000.

Threats to children have therefore been an important element of Western cultural representations ever since the sentimentalisation of "childhood" (Gordon 1988; Holland 1992), but never more than now, as the present heightened era of social anxiety and uncertainty, magnified in not only the end of the century but the millennial milieu, is responded to and shaped by not only the news media, but also through folklore, fiction and cinema (Best 1990).

How is it possible to juggle this critique of the ways in which "children" and "child abuse" get taken up in larger projects which are not necessarily centrally concerned with them, while remaining critical about much of the moral panic explanation in its present form? It is useful to expand the panic theorists' attention to the cultural milieu, and to consider the place of their own arguments in it.

The media, moral panic and child abuse

One of the most interesting features of this kind of academic work is its similarity to some recent media representations of child abuse. This is evident in some media portrayals of "disproportionate" or "unlikely" claims about abuse. Such depictions by no means encompass child abuse in general, and media stories do continue, for the moment at least, to also represent it as a serious social problem – emphasising that, just as with academics, there is no longer one predictable stance even on a specific case (Nava 1988). However, there is now alongside this (fairly recent) acknowledgment of child abuse as "real", a second media tendency concerning certain constructions of child sexual abuse associated with several Western countries since the late 1980s.

The representations here tend to revolve around three types of abuse cases which often overlap with one another. The first kind entails direct state intervention, often involving the removal of many children from their families, and frequently centring on controversy over appropriate techniques of diagnosis: for example, the "Cleveland crisis" in Britain (Campbell 1988; Nava 1988); the actions of Community Services Victoria (CSV) concerning the religious group, The Family; and the Spence case in New Zealand (Atmore 1991, 1996).

The second form of child sexual abuse focus concerns claims which strike at the heart of common assumptions about the (white, middle-class) nuclear family as being far removed from any taint of abuse, and which argue that on the contrary, incest is widespread in such "normal" social groups. Here the spotlight is often on fathers sexually abusing daughters: again, for instance, Cleveland and the Spence case; and also exemplified by a New Zealand controversy over statistics about the prevalence of abuse, presented as part of publicity for a Telethon raising funds to combat family violence (Atmore 1991, 1996).

Last, cases can focus on modes of discovery or types of abuse which are represented by the media as outlandish and beyond belief. Typical examples concern adults' recovered childhood memories, often linked to satanic and ritual abuse. In the past few years there have been numerous controversies of this kind in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, among other countries (Campbell 1990; Cockburn 1990; Dawson 1990; Hechler 1988; Richardson et al. 1991).

These controversies and examples are often the same cases referred to in the emerging academic literature. Other overlaps are apparent in some media depictions describing claims about child sexual abuse either outright as a panic, or as in New Zealand media coverage, a "radical feminist crusade", and as a "witch hunt" led by political extremists resulting in the consolidation of state power at the expense of the "average" family, particularly fathers (Atmore 1994, 1996). Elsewhere, a 1985 poster and advertisement appearing in several Southern Californian newspapers compared accusations of abuse in the McMartin pre-school case to the Salem witch hunts (Hechler 1988, p.4). In Britain, Labour MP Stuart Bell's book, *When Salem Came to the Boro* (1988), claims to tell "the true story of the Cleveland crisis", as a witch hunt of innocent parents by a new inquisition searching for the "devil's mark" of anal dilatation (Campbell 1988, pp.159–60).

The overlap between some academic arguments and media constructions represents an important new phase in moral panic creation and response. Stanley Cohen's original study was part of an era where socially concerned intellectuals criticised the mainstream media for its acquiescence, and even in some cases, instigating role, in moral panic creation. Some 20 years later, however, as Angela McRobbie and Sarah Thornton (1995) point out, the term "moral panic" has become so accepted that it is also used in more popular discourses, including in the media themselves, for whom the act of *creating* a moral panic of some kind may be a newsworthy transgression. Consequently, academia now sometimes finds itself in agreement with constructions in the press and television over the dismissal of concern over child abuse as a moral panic.

At the same time as the shift in the use of moral panic theories, McRobbie and Thornton argue that there has also been a proliferation of panics themselves, which may be more fleeting and no longer so predictably associated with traditional conservative interests. The contemporary context is therefore becoming increasingly "messy" and unpredictable, necessitating a careful analysis of each situation in its local context. If moral panic theories are to retain any degree of usefulness for the 1990s and beyond, they will therefore need to be radically revised (McRobbie & Thornton 1995).

Child abuse epitomises this situation, having always been a difficult issue on which to predict traditional left and right responses, particularly in relation to debates over what kind of relationship should exist between "the family" and "the state". This is due in part to the fact that there is much more at stake than the simple opposition that the two terms might imply, to the extent that even feminists and other "childsavers" approach the issue of state intervention with ambivalence. The lines of division between "goodies" and "baddies" become even less clear in some of the present abuse controversies, in terms of who rallies around the accused or alleged victim, and due to the fact that in ritual abuse cases particularly, it is not always the "traditional" heterosexual male figures (in a social science sense), but also women, who feature as alleged perpetrators. Added and related to all of this is Best's argument that "threats to children" act as a vehicle for all kinds of interests.

Panics to do with child abuse can therefore coalesce in unpredictable ways, and we must now take into account the involvement of both the traditional right and the left in both creating and labelling panics (a point which also suggests that the "moral" aspect of the concept may not always be particularly useful). In the rest of this chapter I will apply and extend this argument to the politics of child abuse representations, in order to argue that in some situations at least, there has emerged a kind of second order panic, arising from a critique of (moral?) panic creation – or in other words, a "panic about panics".

Revising (moral) panic

Mica Nava's (1988) analysis of media representations of the Cleveland crisis offers the first illustration. Nava points out that some sections of the British press, while indicting "childsavers" for creating a witch hunt, ended up constructing a folk devil of their own, in the persona of paediatrician Marietta Higgs. Higgs made an easy target, because along with her key role in the diagnosis of the children as abused, leading to their removal to state care, she was a "foreigner" (Australian) and a feminist (see also Campbell 1988). Similar scapegoating was at work in the New Zealand Spence and Telethon conflicts, with lesbian feminist workers against child sexual abuse being particularly singled out for their "politically and sexually motivated" actions (Atmore 1994, 1996). In both examples, the tables were turned so that the "witch hunters" became the witches.

The rhetoric of these new media claims is in fact an old one. For example,

> *It's the latest chapter in the long story that began with the politically and sexually motivated work of [the lesbian feminists]; it continued with the telethon ... its later chapters are concerned with the outbreak of child-snatching by unqualified social workers from parents falsely accused of inter*

> *fering with their children ... It's a campaign to try to convince us that large numbers of ordinary, decent New Zealand men molest their own children and violently attack those who are nearest and dearest to them* (Roger 1990, p.9).

These kinds of appeals to conspiracy and contagion overlap with some of the academic discourse. Critics like James Richardson (1994) describe the moral panic and its successful claims-makers in terms like "major outbreaks" (p.14), "the spread of anti-satanist ideas around the Western world" (p.5), and in language such as the following:

> *The feminist movement has become a powerful force in American society and elsewhere, with influence in many arenas, including politics and the mass media. Concern for feminist values has become a major element in development of the "political correctness" movement in America, making it somewhat difficult to discuss certain issues* (p.10).

It is useful at this point to return to the original concept of moral panic as being "safe" for conservative forces because it creates folk devils as a distraction from "too hard" social problems. It can easily be argued that panic has not disappeared from the ostensibly "anti-panic" arguments, but instead has been relocated, as a response, in part at least, to fundamental challenges to the social order raised by some analyses of child sexual abuse.

This kind of panic logic also works because it taps into the rhetoric of our era. Here in Australia, for example, we must take into account the tenacity of a rhetoric opposing "political correctness" (Melbourne's newspaper, *The Age*, is particularly tenacious in this respect), to the point of Prime Minister John Howard recently claiming conservative credit for ending the "PC" stranglehold on free speech. Associated with this is the present, and to some degree successful, recasting of feminist initiatives to combat violence, as "going too far" (e.g. Don Parham's 1993 documentary, *Deadly Hurt*, screened on SBS television and now promoted in a tertiary educational video catalogue as "an unbiased investigation into domestic violence").

How can we respond intellectually and politically to this? The contemporary situation requires interdisciplinary work and coalitions which reject simple polarisations. For instance, the tradition in moral panic analysis which defends the wrongly accused molester needs to meet up with feminist arguments centred on trying to eliminate child sexual abuse. Here research could be done to examine how long-term activist concerns about Australian (mainly heterosexual) male sex tourism were transmuted into a 1996 wave of media stories on "paedophiles in Asia" with an almost exclusive focus on the sexual abuse of boys; followed by internal paedophile hunts targeting gay men in New South Wales ('Child sex monster tracked to his lair', *Herald Sun*, 17 April 1996; 'Gay lawyer hits out at "gestapo" tactics', *Australian*, 12 September 1996).

The tendency of research and theory to defend the falsely accused or the rights of children, but not both at once, represents a failure to address how panics can be utilised. Panics may not only deflect attention away from unrelated pressing social issues, as Best (1990) and Richardson (1994) argue. In many controversies over child sexual abuse, casting the strange(r) perpetrator or the feminist whistleblower as folk devil resists a view of abuse which would indeed rock society to its foundations, were it taken seriously. This leads to the last major flaw in the analysis of child sexual abuse as panic, which makes very little distinction between the moral right and feminists, and therefore implies that they share similar views about the causes and characteristics of abuse, and achieve comparable successes in claims-making.

However, this is not the case. The demonised, pathological molester remains an extremely common cultural typification of abusers. For example, the *Herald Sun*'s contribution to the "paedophiles in Asia" stories included a billboard, MONSTER TRACKED DOWN, and an inside headline, 'Twisted taste for the tropics' (17 April 1996, p.3). As the language and imagery suggests, this is a figure promoted by the right, but strongly criticised by feminists, who argue in contrast that perpetrators are more typical of the general (and mainly male) population than otherwise. Feminists therefore view child sexual abuse as "normal", in the sense of being endemic to, and even helping to construct, societies which both eroticise dominance and submission and are shaped by power relations of gender and generation. In turn, this very "normality" of child abuse helps to prevent it from being treated as socially significant – because abuse and abusers must be deviant (Atmore 1991, 1994, 1996).

These kinds of examples should not mean that an analysis of panics as a deflection from the unpleasant realities of child sexual abuse must apply across the board. There will probably continue to be panics which generate unfair child abuse accusations apparently "out of thin air". However, it would be interesting to see whether such cases could be traced to conservative interests (even while acknowledging that in the present era of blurred boundaries, the right and feminists may not completely be without common ground in at least some situations). For example, we might expect a different shape to cultural forces and outcomes when comparing a case involving "standard" nuclear family charges and one indicting childcare centres.

All of this necessitates paying more attention to the various interests that may be served by claims about abuse, and keeping sight of the locally specific while tracing the complexities of links to the more global. The media, academic research and theories, and appeals to panic (or not to) are just some of the paths to trace in a web of practices and ideas woven around major forms of oppression that are unlikely to significantly decrease in the foreseeable future.

Note

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Representations of specific youth populations

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Kerry Carrington

Representations of young women as victims of sexual violence

PAULA BROWN, last seen at 4 am in Sydney's Oxford Street on Saturday 4 May 1996, was found eights days later, having been raped and murdered. On 3 November 1989, in Newcastle NSW, Leigh Leigh was brutalised and violently sexually assaulted before being bludgeoned to death with a large rock. In Sydney's western suburbs, Anita Cobby, former nurse and beauty queen was viciously raped and murdered on 4 February 1986. While objectively all three were particularly brutal sex crimes, the status of each of these victims has been discursively constituted very differently. Leigh Leigh was discursively represented as a victim of parental failure and sexual promiscuity. Anita Cobby was represented as a victim of one of the most horrifying rape/murders of this century committed by a group of men likened to a pack of animals. The victim status of Paula Brown – the most recently deceased of the three – is still in the making but already Alan Jones, Steve Meacham and other public commentaries have labelled her a victim of a "new phenomenon": female binge drinking. Her murderer has not been found – but the public search for a culprit has so far settled upon the zebra skin mini skirt worn by the deceased on the night of her disappearance.

My purpose in comparing the public representations of these victims is to analyse how such tragedies provide an opportunity for the wide dissemination of responsibilising discourses about risk and conduct. Themes in such discourses revolve around parental responsibility, adolescent conduct, "appropriate" deportment and dress codes for young women, risks to avoid in the good management of one's potential victimisation. In these discourses, the responsibility for avoiding one's own victimisation, rests with the government of the self through the minimisation of risk and the avoidance of danger. The object of government is one's potential identity as a female victim of unprovoked male violence.

Paula Brown was reported as having vanished from the Oxford Street night club strip in Sydney in the early hours of Saturday morning, 4 May 1996. The fact that she was missing was widely publicised. Her body was found eight days later in bushland near Port Botany. It was reported that she had been sexually assaulted before being killed. During the eight days before her body was found, the police through the media called for witnesses who had last seen her in Oxford street. A poster with a photo and description of the missing person was advertised in the papers.[1] A mobile police station and a mannequin dressed as Paula Brown, in a black and white zebra skin mini skirt, platform shoes and tight fitting black lace top was erected in Oxford street near Hungry Jacks where she was last seen alive. There was a great media frenzy about the family calling in a clairvoyant to find Paula Brown.[2] As it turned out the clairvoyants got it almost right. Her body was indeed found in the scrubland and sand dunes near a small cove in Port Botany. The discovery was announced on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* 'MURDER PAULA'S BODY FOUND':

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[1] 'MISSING Have you seen this person', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 1996, p.5, 'Happy night out on the town ... now where is Paula Brown', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May 1996.

> *Police said Ms Brown was still dressed in the distinctive zebra print minny* (sic) *skirt and black lace top she was wearing when she was last seen alive in the early hours of Saturday, May 4. Also Ms Brown was last seen alive at 3.35 am on Saturday, May 4 at Hungry Jacks in Oxford St, Darlinghurst, and was believed to have been extremely intoxicated. Earlier she had been drinking with friends at the Burdekin Hotel after dinner at The Rocks. When she disappeared police believe she had been carrying $600 in cash and was in the company of two unknown men* (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 1996).

Following the report of her murder, there was much exhortation regarding Paula's "bubbly" personality and fondness of partying. Under the banner headline 'Tragedy of the girl who loved to party' a moral fairytale was unfolding which represented "girls who wanna have fun" as girls living dangerously. Paula Brown was described thus:

> *With her Pamela Anderson looks, her sexy clothes, her beautiful smile, her habit of calling everyone "sweetie darling", and her weakness for expensive champagne, new Zealand-born Paula was the quintessential party girl ... Stuck on Paula's fridge is a magnet saying "This girl knows how to RAGE". But on Friday night ten days ago, raging for a pretty girl in downtown Sydney was a dangerous sport* (*Daily Telegraph*, 14 May 1996, p.3).

In a two-page spread under the headline 'Party girl Paula's date with a killer' the *Sun-Herald* represented Paula as the one having made the fatal mistake that invited her attack.

> *Murdered Sydney hairdresser Paula Brown was a fun-loving girl who made one fatal mistake ... "Often we'd get plastered and I'd have to ring up David to come and get her", recalled Paula's friend and business partner Margo Hendricks. "I'd say: David, she's done it again"* (*Sun-Herald*, 19 May 1996).

The airwaves were clogged by those who wanted to castigate women who dare to party. Following what appeared to be a police leak of information from a taxi driver, Alan Jones announced on popular Sydney radio station 2UE: "I mean what was the lady doing, for God's sake, in Oxford Street at a quarter to three, taking a taxi with a merchant seaman to Port Botany? Not, I might add, to look over the ship ... But, quite frankly, the young lady really shouldn't have been in a taxi heading to Port Botany at a quarter to three in the morning." (*Manly Daily*, 18 May 1996). The mother and fiancée of Paula Brown demanded a public apology from radio announcer Alan Jones. In the process they were drawn into a public spectacle of having to defend Paula's reputation. "David Raynere said his fiancée would not have got into a taxi with a sailor if she was in sound mind and should not be judged for allegedly doing so. 'Something could have been put in her drink – we just don't know,' he said" (*Manly Daily*, 18 May, 1996). The editorial of the *Manly Daily* went in to bat for the family denouncing Alan Jones' statements as "deplorable" and "ill-informed" reminding readers of the time he was charged and arrested in London in 1988 with outraging public decency. The editorial pointed out that the matters were subsequently withdrawn but, "No doubt Mr Jones would have been more than a little upset with anyone who had pre-judged him" (Editorial, *Manly Daily*, 18 May, 1996).

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[2] 'Mystic search for woman', *Sunday Telegraph*, 12 May 1996, p.19. "Distraught relatives of missing Sydney hairdresser Paula Brown have tuned to clairvoyants in the search for clues to her whereabouts. Friends and family yesterday scoured abandoned Botany ware houses after two clairvoyants said she would be found there."

Public discourses which sought to place the blame for Paula's selection as a victim upon the conduct of vivacious liberated young women picked up even more momentum. Under the headline 'Fear stalks Friday night', the *Daily Telegraph* issued a warning to young women not to drink with strangers, not to act like men, not to assume a carefree independence, or risk ending up like Paula Brown or Anita Cobby (the article made explicit reference to both murders). This fable demonised the girl's Friday night out. A young woman, Alison, is pictured above the story under the caption, "I am going to have to be more careful" (*Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1996). The story elaborated: "Alison said she went out 'for a bit of fun' … however … the tragedy of Paula Brown was just the latest in a series of attacks that had taught her to be more careful" (*Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1996). The responsibilising discourses which make young women, not men, responsible for avoiding their own victimisation to sexual violence are being articulated with a vengeance here. An imaginary community of women are represented as bound together by their risk of falling victim to sexual violence. It is their "imaginary voice" which is being enunciated through the words of Alison – on the brink of disaster – on the edge of ruin – about to go out for a bit of fun after work on Friday night. They are warned not to. Having learnt her "lesson" Alison is able to retell her story to a whole community of young women just in case they were poised to go out for a bit of fun.

> *Two weeks ago Paula Brown set our with her mates to do what thousands of other Sydney women do every Friday – let off steam after a week working in the nation's largest city. But before the morning she was dead – and the girls' night out had changed, possibly forever. Latest research indicates that Sydney women have begun to behave like men always did – going out together drinking … Alison said she and her friends had not always stuck together when they drank … "But now after what happened to Paula Brown I am not going to do that anymore. It is a lesson – it can be a good lesson because it shows you have got to be more careful"* (*Daily Telegraph*, 17 May, 1996).

In a full-page feature story, the *Sydney Morning Herald* went even further than the tabloid *Daily Telegraph*. It represented young women "binge-drinkers" as the social demon of the 1990s. The article, 'Friday Night Fever' begins: "On a typical Friday a month ago today, Paula Brown went missing and was later found murdered. The drinking trail which preceded her death will have baffled many people – yet it is a common phenomenon. Steve Meacham and two colleagues – all newly arrived in Sydney – retrace her footsteps." Meacham crafts a particularly brutal demonisation of young women out on the town on a Friday night. He says nothing whatsoever about young men drunk on the town, or their anti-social behaviour when drunk such as groping, spitting, swearing, chucking, jostling or fighting.

> *Summoning what remains of co-ordination, the drunk pauses by the side of the road and, in the exaggerated deliberation of advanced inebriation, manages to pull out a mobile phone from a bag, stabbing at the instrument in an effort to summon a cab. It has been almost four hours since the drunk arrived with some office colleagues for "a few drinks after work". And it has been "a good*

> *night", which accounts for the drunk not being able to remember the cab number. So, after issuing a mild expletive, she (for you will have guessed that the drunk is a she) puts her phone back in her handbag, pulls the rim* (sic) *of mini-skirt down a decorous inch or two, and staggers off into the night. Shortly afterwards, three girls emerge from the same pub, form an impromptu conga and go down the street singing the anthem of the night. "We are Hot! Hot! Hot!" Welcome to Sydney's Friday night swill, '90s-style, in which the name of the game seems to be for the men to get drunk and the women to get drunker ... Even before Paula's murder, I had been shocked by the licentiousness on public display in Sydney's CBD each Friday ... I was staggered by the phenomenon of "women drinking to get drunk"* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 1996).

Meacham denies that Paula Brown deserved her fate – reminding readers that in a perfect liberal world, women should be able to dress and drink as they like. Some consolation. He poses a number of unresolved questions about that night,

> *Why would an attractive businesswoman, apparently happily engaged to her boyfriend of 11 years, set out on Friday night to get totally wasted? Why did she and her girlfriends consider it a normal part of their social lives to meet every few weeks and drink themselves into such a stupor that, by their own admission, one or other of them would be loaded, mindless, into a cab? Why did Paula Brown, knowing she might end up drunk, change into an outfit – a black-and-white zebra print shirt and a black lace top – which, though perfectly acceptable in a trendy nightclub, made her a vulnerable target on the imperfect and politically incorrect streets of Sydney at 2.30 am? ... Why did they (and, tragically, Paula) assume that no ill would come to them, no matter how raucous or unrestrained their behaviour?* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 May 1996).

The obvious questions not of interest to this newspaper journalist, but certainly more critical to the commission of the act of gratuitous sexual violence which ended in Paula Brown's murder; include: who murdered her; what efforts have been made to locate her murderer; why would some moron want to sexually assault and murder this attractive woman anyway; how many more men are like this in our community; what can be done to make the inner city safer for women like Paula and the thousands like her who go out on a Friday night for a bit of harmless fun, and why should this newspaper journalist feel he is entitled to answers to the long list of invasive questions about Paula's life, friends and boyfriend? Such tabloid journalism broadcasts the vulnerability of young women to sexual assault, demonises young women who drink for pleasure, and constructs a narrative of this crime in which only one sex – women – have any responsibility for what might happen to them if they get drunk. Those who prey upon the vulnerabilities of young women are completely absent from the narrative. In the absence of any murderer, the clues are sought in the victims' own conduct – then generalised to a whole generation of young liberated women. The male members of that imaginary generation are relieved of any responsibility for the victims of sexual violence.

The narrative closure to this fable is represented in a letter published in the *Daily Telegraph*, under the heading 'Risks of girls night out':

> *... The reality is, it is definitely not safe to go out and roam the streets unless your boyfriend is with you or all your girlfriends are 6ft (1.8m) neanderthal beasts. Come on, let's be serious* (*Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 1996).

In the public discourses which followed Paula Brown's sexual assault and murder, the responsibility for avoiding victimisation firmly rested with young women who were called upon to modify their behaviour to avoid violent crime. Paula's murderer has not been found

– but the public search for a culprit has so far settled upon the zebra skin mini skirt worn by the deceased on the night of her disappearance. The demonisation of young women who dare to participate in "a bit of fun" is not, however, an isolated public response to brutal acts of sexual violence.

There are many resonances with the spectacle surrounding the crime involving Paula Brown and the rape and murder of Leigh Leigh some years ago in Newcastle.

On the night of 3 November 1989, 14-year-old Leigh Leigh was sexually assaulted, strangled, bashed and bludgeoned to death with a large rock. In much of the public and courtroom discourse about this brutal sex crime, the consumption of drugs and alcohol, sexual promiscuity and a lack of parental supervision were represented as the reasons for the crime. The discourses of guilt were so thoroughly and mercilessly inverted that Matthew Webster, following his conviction for the murder of Leigh Leigh, was represented as a "gentle giant" and an unfortunate victim of "uncharacteristic and impulsive ferocity while disinhibited by alcohol and drugs" *R v. Webster*.[3] A quite remarkable silencing occurred. The murder was disconnected from the continuum of collective violence that had preceded it, and understandings of the crime as one involving a violent sexual assault upon the victim were almost completely expunged from public discourse.[4] Elsewhere I have analysed how this silencing occurred (Carrington & Johnson 1994). My interest here is to draw comparisons with the way Paula Brown was represented in public discourse.

Like Paula Brown's murder, no solid suspects were immediately available for public speculation. The suspects were initially represented as strangers – as outsiders passing through Stockton that night (*Sun-Herald*, 12 November 1989). On the Monday after the discovery of Leigh's brutally bashed body the *Newcastle Herald* published a front page news story, in which the absence of parental supervision emerged as the key to understanding this horrific act of sexual violence. Detective Sgt. Chaffey, the homicide detective in charge of the murder investigation was quoted as saying: "It was obvious that there had been some alcohol at the party and that there had been no parental control" (*Newcastle Herald*, 6 November 1989).

Leigh's victimisation is represented as a product of parental failure. This discourse of blame percolated throughout the media coverage and the murder investigation but intensified during Webster's murder hearing. In sentencing Webster, Justice Wood launched a sustained attack upon the parents who allowed their children to attend the Stockton party, stating:

> *... it is entirely reprehensible that this party should have been allowed to take place without adult supervision to prevent the unlawful abuse of alcohol and drugs and the considerable amount of promiscuous sexual activity which took place between a large number of teenagers present* (R v. Webster, p.2) *... It should not have been left to the police to check on this party or to endeavour to exercise control over functions such as this. Police have other valuable work to do and the care of young teenagers cannot be delegated to them. It is the responsibility of parents who organise such parties, or who allow their children to attend, to ensure that they are appropriately supervised and that the children are properly counselled about the dangers in the use of alcohol and drugs and also in relation to intimate relationships* (*R v. Webster*, p.10).

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[3] "Why Stockton's 'gentle giant' will not get a life sentence", (*Newcastle Herald*, 23 October 1990). See also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October 1990, 3, last paragraph.

[4] There were two significant exceptions: Adele Horin, 'Murder exposes cultural bogies', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November, 1993; Catherine Lumby, 'Group rape: a crime that's far from rare', ibid., 9 November, 1993, p.3.

While expressing considerable concern about "lack of parental supervision" and "sexual promiscuity", Justice Wood's judgment made no reference to sexual violence, and considerably diminished the extent of collective violence inflicted upon Leigh at the party just prior to her murder, stating, "Only a small group of men mistreated her" (*R v. Webster*, p.6) Justice Wood further stated:

> *... A duty is owed to all young persons to ensure that they are protected from the inevitable peer group pressures at functions such as this, to experiment with and to abuse alcohol and drugs and to engage in sexual promiscuity of the kind which occurred here* (*R v. Webster*, p.6).

Justice Wood's comments were uncritically re-represented in public discourse (*Newcastle Herald*, 23 October, 1990; *Newcastle Herald*, 25 October, 1990; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October, 1990). An editorial (*Newcastle Herald*, 26 October, 1990) and a letter published by the newspaper later in the week renewed the public criticism of parental failure (*Newcastle Herald*, 27 October, 1990). A feature article about the crime appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend* a month later. It quoted Justice Wood as saying, "Every parent involved really wears this on their conscience".

Having established the main reason for Leigh's vulnerability to victimisation in terms of a discourse which placed much of the blame unfairly upon her mother, the public interrogation for clues to the motive of this heinous crime turned to the signals emitted by the body of the victim herself. Leigh Leigh, although deceased, became a public figure – a simulacra – a former representation of representations of herself. Those representations were simulations of other depictions etched in graffiti, generated in gossip and passed on to to police investigators and newspaper journalists. Although such imagery has no correspondence with the real victim, it nevertheless has profound truth effects in public discourse. The public representations of Leigh Leigh incorporated three elements: that she was a pretty school girl with an adventurous, sometimes rebellious spirit and that she looked older than 14.[5] An example of this discourse can be seen in the following extract from a feature which appeared in *Good Weekend* after Webster's conviction. It was written by Mark Riley a journalist who had been a police reporter in Newcastle at the time of the murder.

> *Leigh found new friends easily when she moved with her mother to Stockton from another area of Newcastle in late 1985. She was an outgoing girl, a bit rebellious at times, but always a helpful loving daughter ... Leigh developed an outlook on life that was older than her years. They discussed sex often as Leigh moved through puberty. Robyn remembers that her daughter also developed quicker physically than her friends, assuming the body of a woman at age 14 that made her the subject of admiration among some girlfriends* (*Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend*, 24 November 1990).

Just as Meacham sought the clues to Paula Brown's murder in the conduct of thousands of young women who drink after work on a Friday, the clues to this murder were being sought in public representations and fabrications of the victim's identity, not in the reasons for the commission of such a horrific act of sexual violence. By contrast, Webster was described in this same story as "a young man, perhaps younger than his years" (*Sydney Morning Herald Good*

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[5] For example: "the school girl" *Newcastle Herald*, 17 November 1989; "a pretty year nine Newcastle High School student", *Newcastle Herald*, 9 November, 1989; and "the pretty blonde", *Newcastle Herald*, 7 November, 1989.

Weekend, 24 November 1990). The discourses of guilt and innocence are here reversed. The innocence associated with childhood is attributed to Matthew Webster, while Leigh Leigh was represented as having "lost her innocence" in the sandhills earlier that night. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

> *Leigh stumbled as she ran across the grass strip separating the old surf club hall from the beach, her mind spinning under the influence of a cocktail of emotion, guilt and alcohol. It had been a less than romantic introduction to sex – a quick experience with a 15-year-old boy in the sandhills that she was sure had left her pregnant* (Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend, 24 November 1990).

Justice Wood's comments and the public discourses that in some instances wildly exaggerated them rewrote a narrative of horrific sexual violence into a normalised set of understandings of this crime as an act of "misrecognition" on the part of a "gentle giant". Matthew Webster somehow mistook a "no" for a "yes" and was later compelled by a force beyond his own control to bludgeon her head in with a huge rock when she resisted his attempts to molest her. She is the one represented as having been shamed. His agency, his sexuality, his violence and his shame are written out of the narrative of this crime. The power of this narrative was so strong that it even silenced the unmistakable forensic evidence of hideous injuries to the victim's genitals. Alongside the substantial forensic and witness evidence suggesting Leigh Leigh was violently sexually assaulted, a view obviously accepted by both the coronial and police investigators at the outset, and confirmed more recently by Justice Moore,[6] the evidentiary basis for abandoning this theory about the crime is flimsy to say the least. What has mattered in this case, is the public rewriting of a narrative of closure – not justice, truth, restitution or anything remotely assembling an accurate portrayal of the events of that night. The fanciful reconstruction of events connected her selection as a victim to having "lost" her virginity.[7] Although an absurd connection, the incident in the sandhills became absolutely central to the discourses of blame which began to circulate in this case. It was the event around which Leigh Leigh was constituted as "having lost her innocence" and her legitimacy as a victim too. Similar narrative structures of blame and closure can be detected in the public representation of the brutal rape and murder of Paula Brown, particularly in the responses of media commentators such as Alan Jones and Steve Meacham.

Objectively, the rape and murder of Leigh Leigh is no less disgusting than the rape and murder of Anita Cobby in that both were particularly brutal murders which involved a number of assailants in a range of sustained acts of collective physical and sexual violence ending in murder. Yet the way both these crimes were investigated and represented in public discourse differ significantly. The young nurse, and former beauty queen was consistently represented in terms of the discourses of innocence (Sheppard 1991, p.204). She had been photographed as Miss Western Suburbs Charity Queen and this was the photo perpetually recycled in the public narrative of this crime. We have already seen how Leigh Leigh was represented in terms of the discourses of guilt for having attended a party at which there were sex, drugs and alcohol and how Paula Brown "the quintessential party girl" was represented as having invited her own attack through being inebriated in a public night club wearing a zebra skin mini skirt. The narrative retelling of the collective rape and murder of Anita Cobby was constructed symbolically, not as an act of sexual violence, but primarily as an act of barbarism and primitivism. The crime was committed by a group of young men likened to a pack of wild animals (*R v. John Raymond Travers, Michael James Murdoch, Leslie Joseph Murphy, Michael Patrick Murphy, Gary Steven Murphy*, p.6) and thus represented a violation of the moral sensibility of the entire community. Justice Maxwell sentenced Anita Cobby's killers, John Travers, the three Murphy brothers, and Michael Murdoch to life with the recommendation "never to be released" (p.11).

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[6] On 31 May 1995 Judge Moore handed down a landmark decision in the Newcastle District Court, awarding a total of $150,000 as compensation to relatives of Leigh Leigh murdered 3 November 1989 (*Jessie Leigh & Robyn Leigh v Victims Compensation Fund Corporation*). Judge Moore found Leigh was subject to a number of criminal assaults in the hours before her murder (p.3). The first was a rape by a 15-year-old boy, who was charged with carnal knowledge. The second act of violence involved a number of boys who spat, kicked, and verbally abused Leigh on the ground outside and then inside the club-house. The Judge named Jason Robinson, Fat Mat (Matthew Webster), Jay Hume, Shane Price, Guy Wilson & Higgo (Craig Higginson) as some of the boys involved in the assaults. Judge Moore pointed out that, "One of the assailants, and only one, has been detected and charged with assault" (*Robyn Leigh v. Victims Compensation Tribunal*, 1995, p.3) The third act of violence was described by Judge Moore as an act of sexual assault "related to the act of murder" (p.9A), "by persons who have not yet been detected" (*Jessie Leigh & Robyn Leigh v. Victims Compensation Fund Corporation*, 1995, p.8). See Carrington & Johnson, 1995 for more detail.

[7] It is worth noting that this was written by the same journalist, the then police reporter for the *Newcastle Herald*, who reported the crime as involving the brutal sexual assault of the victim, possibly by a number of boys, in its immediate aftermath. An interesting memory lapse.

In an innovative and provocative analysis of the power effects of textual representation of crime, Alison Young (1996, pp.8–10) suggests that crime acts as a potent sign of decease, threat and evil. The criminal acts as a signifier for the textual outlaw in an imaginary community whereby everyone is constituted (in discourse) as a vicarious victim of crime. Those who raped and murdered Anita Cobby were represented as textual outlaws whose conduct was considered so deplorable as to be outside of humanity. The concept of the textual outlaw is different to the Durkhiemian concept whereby punishment of the offender (rule-breaker) restores equilibrium to the collective conscience. Textual outlaws must be expelled to restore harmony to some imaginary community (Young 1996, p.11).

> *The symbolically sacrificed outlaw is thus a victim of our desire for community (through shared victimisation) ... Outlaws who commit crime generate a sense of commonality ... where victimisation is posited as a communal experience ... A community is founded upon victimisation and victimisation constitutes the necessary entry subscription. The community that results is, of course, a simulacrum of a community; a phantasm that speaks of a nostalgic desire for oneness and unity ... Thus modernist criminal justice offers an impoverished, pale version of community, which mimics the recognition of the yearned-for pre-modern community. Recognition is not based upon friendship, but upon the awareness of risk and danger* (Young 1996, p.10).

Crime is no doubt a potent signifier – in which we (the imaginary community) constitute ourselves vicariously as victims. The wave of public outrage over the bashing murder of British tourist, Brian Hagland at Bondi Beach, 7 September 1996, is a fresh example.[8] In much of the media coverage, Bondi, the community, is actually represented as the victim under the banner headlines 'How Bondi lost its innocence'; 'Death in Bondi'; 'Police believe they know Bondi killers', 'As Bondi grieves, a man steps forward'. Bondi, the community, is even elevated to possessing the human ability to grieve. The collective conscience of Bondi residents poured onto the radio talk-back shows to lament the commission of this crime in their neighbourhood. The crime is not so much the bashing of a tourist (or whether he was run over by a bus) but the adverse international visibility attracted to Bondi as a tourist resort. Crimes like these certainly invoke the criminal as the textual outlaw and every member of the community as a victim of one kind or another. However, crime is not a unitary signifier. Crimes of sexual violence invoke a range of other highly potent signifiers about sexuality, which all too often collapse into a public interrogation and mapping of the sexuality of the victim.

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[8] 'Death in Bondi', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 10 September 1996; 'Police believe they know Bondi killers', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 10 September 1996; 'As Bondi grieves, a man steps forward' *Sydney Morning Herald,* 11 September 1996; 'Last moments of Brian Hagland' *Sydney Morning Herald,* 12 September 1996; 'How Bondi lost its innocence' 14 September 1996.

The deeply felt collective sentiments aroused by crimes of heterosexual sexual violence represent a reversal of the classic Durkheimian notion that punishment of the offender restores social equilibrium (Lukes & Scull 1983, p.15). In the case of heterosexual violence all too often it is the victims, not the offenders, who are expelled as textual outlaws. The public representations of Paula Brown and Leigh Leigh referred to here are examples of young women whose representations defy the norms of feminine coyness and passivity and violate norms about public space, adolescent sexuality and dress codes. These are the young women symbolically expelled from the imaginary community of legitimate victims. Their expulsion from the normal boundaries of femininity then allows for a symbolic reversal of the discourses of guilt and shame. The crime is vicariously experienced, understood and represented from the vantage point of the frustrated sex-offender, lured into seduction, led astray, and teased beyond control. I am not suggesting that crimes of sexual violence will always be unsympathetic to young women, as the Anita Cobby case illustrates. Rather that horrific crimes of sexual violence too easily slot into a ready-made, tried and tested set of popular genres in which young women are either represented as the textual outlaws of femininity who somehow deserved or invited their attack, or as the golden girls of innocence, femininity and purity, whose victimisation is represented as a gross violation of the norms of an imaginary community of upright citizens.

I want to take the analysis one step further by contrasting the representation of these crimes with the public representation of what have become known as the paedophile hearings being conducted by the Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service. The hearings opened in a blaze of publicity surrounding the release of a homemade video by Dolly Dunn which Justice Wood described as "an evil film in the sense it is rather frightening for me to think there would be people driving around filming small boys largely from the rear" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 March 1996). Justice Wood gave the media free access to the video and 50 still pornographic photographs. A frenzy of moral outrage denouncing the homosexual abuse of young boys followed under headlines, such as 'Unspeakable images of sex acts on young boys' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 March 1996).[9] A one-page feature article in the *Sydney*

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[9] A selection of some headline stories published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Child sex photos left of the files' 21 March 1996; 'Paedophile evidence not passed on to investigators' 22 March 1996, p.7; 'Smear and loathing' 25 March 1996; 'Suspended: the welfare clerk who preyed on boys' 26 March 1996; 'Paedophile jail warning to NSW public servants', 27 March 1996; 'Officers, media shocked by harrowing evidence' 27 March 1996; 'Paedophile with a lavish lifestyle' 28 March 1996; '"Number one boys dumped at 17"' 28 March 1996; 'Perils of trying to screen out the perverts' 28 March 1996; 'Victims jam paedophile lines' 29 March 1996; 'Father begged Bell to leave sons alone' 29 March 1996; 'parties, drugs lured young' 29 March 1996; 'A paedophile's twisted trail of business and pleasure' 2 April 1996; 'Warrant issued for Bells arrest' 3 April 1996; 'Stolen Innocence' 3 April 1996; 'Abuse

Morning Herald announced, "Day after day the Police Royal Commission is exposing the vile stain of paedophilia across society – and with every bit of ghastly evidence made public; victims of abuse are forced to relive their horror" (3 April 1996). At this stage of proceedings, not one of the victims of sexual abuse to which the Royal Commission referred was female.

The whole direction of the Royal Commission hearings publicity reconstructed the issue along heterosexist lines – narrowing the issue of the police protection of sexual assault to the police protection of homosexual child sexual assault. In response to criticism of homophobia by the gay press and other commentaries, Justice Wood vowed the Royal Commission would examine the issue of abuse involving female victims. However, during six months of hearings, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Wood Royal Commission only heard one afternoon's evidence relating to the sexual assault of young girls:

> *There has only been small attention paid to girls. There has been, in the few cases taken up ample evidence of young girls running away from home and being drawn into prostitution. Evidence was taken from a young woman drawn into a sexual relationship with her Anglican rector. And there was virtually one afternoon given to incest, though Justice James Wood recognises it as a big problem* (Malcolm Brown, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1996).

Justice Wood, presently the Royal Commissioner, is the same judicial officer, who in sentencing Matthew Webster for the murder of Leigh Leigh described him in his judgment as a "first offender of otherwise good character".

> *Generally, he has a reputation among friends and family for being a gentle, shy and polite young man who is somewhat lacking in self confidence. On the basis of his reputation and antecedents, the offence would seem to be out of character ... This prisoner is a first offender of otherwise good character. He behaved with uncharacteristic and impulsive ferocity while disinhibited by alcohol and drugs* (*R v. Webster*, pp.7–8).

By contrast Leigh Leigh was represented in the judge's comments as a victim of a parental failure and a willing participant in a wild party involving sexual promiscuity and the reckless consumption of drugs and alcohol. Through the symbolic representation of the victim as offender and offender as victim, the discourses of guilt and innocence were reversed. What has mattered so much in this case has not been the evidence of prolonged and collective physical, sexual and verbal abuse inflicted upon the victim prior to her brutal murder, but the discourses of guilt in circulation. Media reports of the judgment then elaborated upon these legal fictions.

> *The facts as they emerged from the trial of her murderer were stark: a 14-year-old school girl loses her innocence and hours later her life in darkened sand dunes. At the wild unsupervised birthday party she attended that night there was drug and alcohol abuse and promiscuity among some of the young guests, some of whom were only 13* (*Newcastle Herald*, 1 November 1990, p.9).

By contrast, the Royal Commission paedophile hearings have under the direction of Justice Wood, constructed a much more sympathetic space for the victims of homosexual

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victim tells of intimidation' 3 April 1996; 'Operation identified Public Service paedophiles' 10 April 1996; 'Paedophile watchers axed' 11 April 1996; 'Charity calls for register of paedophiles' 12 April 1996; 'Wood calls for child sex case review' 13 April 1996; 'School for scoundrel' 13 April 1996; 'Bell flees to Italy, leaving 16-year-old boy behind' 15 April 1996; 'Lord Mayor supplied young boys for sex' 10 May 1996; 'The Paedophile Horror: A shameful affair', *Sun-Herald*, 28 April 1996.

child sexual assaults. The narrative of the paedophile hearings has centred around the commission of homosexual acts between men and boys – rather than the commission of sexual violence. The offenders, men like Dolly Dunn, have been well and truly constructed as textual outlaws – to be outed and expunged from civil society. For six months in 1996–97 "the community" was invited to share the Royal Commission's daily denunciations of these textual outlaws and the police who protect them from prosecution. If Leigh Leigh had been a boy – and her attackers older men – objectively it would make no difference to the brutality of this hideous crime, but I can't resist the observation that it would have made a vast difference to its judicial interpretation and public retelling.

The point in juxtaposing the divergent representations of Paula Brown and Leigh Leigh with the representations of Anita Cobby and the nameless victims of paedophilia, has not been to claim, disclaim or in any way measure, the legitimacy of each of these tragic victims against each other. Absolutely no-one, for any reason whatsoever deserves to be raped as these three young women were so brutally before being murdered, and as the silent and nameless victims of child sexual abuse are sometimes on a routinised basis. The point of this analysis is to demonstrate just how forceful the recuperative and interpretative powers of the discursive constructions of these crimes are at the level of their symbolic representation in public culture (see Threadgold 1996, p.308). Each of the victims was transformed through their representation in the mediums of popular culture into objects of power – as cases, as narratives of moral tragedy, and as powerful signifiers to an imaginary community of young women – as examples of a fate that awaits young women who fail to take self-responsibility for avoiding their own victimisation.

Ruth Webber & Ulla Svensson

Print media's portrayal of boys who kill

IN FEBRUARY 1995 a Melbourne taxi driver was robbed and stabbed by two teenage boys aged 13 and 14. The driver was stabbed twice, his throat was slit and he was left to bleed to death. Although a youth worker immediately reported to the police a phone conversation she had overheard a few days after the killing, it took three months before the boys were arrested, and only after another boy had told the police he had a cassette tape of conversations with the two boys (in the hope of claiming the reward of $10,000 offered for information on the murder).

The public was shocked by the young age of the two accused boys and details of the murder, the trials and the sentencing received wide media coverage. *The Weekend Australian* (17–18 August 1996) asked: "How does a 13-year-old become a cold-blooded killer and enter the criminal records as possibly Australia's youngest convicted murderer?". Many newspaper articles held out the promise that an answer could be found to this question.

Parallels were drawn between the Melbourne murder and the Bulger case in Britain in 1993 (see chapter 6). James Bulger was only two years old when he was killed by two boys aged ten who enticed him away from his mother at a shopping centre, led him to a railway line and murdered him. The British and international press represented and interpreted this event in the context of wider issues such as moral standards, parental responsibilities and government policies. The Bulger case, according to Alison Young (1996, p.139), focused attention on "the twin evils of parenting and violent videos". The media portrayed the murdered Bulger boy as coming from "a good family" while the two murderers came from bad families. The murdered boy's mother was portrayed as the good kind of mother while the murderers' mothers were either doing too much or too little mothering. The point made by Young is that these media representations did not accord with the experience of those involved in the tragedy. All three mothers were both good and bad and cannot simply be described in terms of good or bad, evil or innocent. She argues that the media did not provide a complex analysis, but instead set up a series of oppositions so that the murder became portrayed as a play of evil and innocence.

White (1990, p.107) contends that there are four stereotypical images presented about young people in the mass media. He claims that when a young person receives media coverage, he or she is portrayed as an "ideal" young person, or as a "threat", "victim" or "parasite". Similarly, Drury and Jamrozik (1985), who looked at the content of the *Australian Journal* *of Social Issues* from 1961 to 1984, found three groups of young people emerged in the articles: "idealistic" deviants who wanted a better world and were seen as members of the counter culture; delinquents and young offenders who were seen as a "threat" to society; and unemployed and disadvantaged youth who were seen as "victims" of the system (Drury & Jamrozik 1985, p.19). White (1990) suggests that most typifications of young people by the media are negative. In this way young people may be sympathised with as victims of circumstances, criticised for being parasites and also seen as a threat because of their illegal activity.

This chapter explores whether young people accused of murder are portrayed in the ways White (1990) suggests, or whether perhaps more complex images are used. Following Young's (1996) argument that the print media construct a series of oppositions, we also ask whether the case involving the murder of the Melbourne taxi driver is best understood as a contest between evil and innocence.

An extensive review was conducted of newspaper articles about the two boys accused of murdering the taxi driver with articles taken from two daily broadsheets and their weekend counterparts: *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Sunday Age* and *The Weekend Australian*. There were many articles written about this case, presumably because the crime was spectacular and made good copy. It was also heavily reported because the boys did not plead guilty and so there were protracted court proceedings.

A description of the case is outlined briefly here, followed by an analysis of the media's portrayal of the two boys involved in the murder.

The murder case

About six months before the killing of the taxi driver, Tom aged 13 and Jason aged 14 met at a residential unit operated by the Victorian child protection system. They had both been taken into care because of problems at home and became close friends. A week prior to the murder the two boys had robbed another taxi driver, and on that occasion everything worked out as planned. The second armed robbery ended in death. Both boys were charged with murder and both pleaded not guilty, each blaming the other. Because the boys' statements about the killing did not coincide, tests were carried out for fingerprints and blood stains, but no direct evidence was found against either of the boys and it became one boy's word against the other. Jason changed his plea on the sixth day of the committal hearing; he now pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the case of the second taxi driver and armed robbery in the case of the other. In view of this, the prosecution agreed to drop the murder charge against Jason and he became the main prosecution witness in the murder trial of Tom (*Age*, 29 November 1995). After pleading guilty, Jason was sentenced to three years detention in a youth training centre, two years for manslaughter and one year for armed robbery (*Age*, 8 December 1995). Months later Tom was found guilty of murder and sentenced to 13 years imprisonment with a minimum term of eight years (*Australian*, 13 August 1996). At the age of 14 he became the youngest person sentenced to detention in an adult jail.

A killer had to be nominated

In the early reports of the murder, both boys were portrayed in a similar way. However, as the trial progressed their portrayals subtly changed to the point where Tom and Jason were seen as fundamentally different to each other. Tom increasingly was pictured as a ruthless killer while Jason was portrayed as a naughty child led astray by his evil friend. The implication was that if Jason had not met Tom he would never have become "bad". The rationale for the media developing these opposing views of the two offenders does not seem to be based on their past histories, nor on factors leading up to the murder. Although Jason confessed to being the initiator of both robberies, Tom ended up being nominated the "ringleader". Similarly, although it was Jason who had a "police record", it was Tom who ended up being seen as the boy with a criminal past.

Jason admitted that it was he who first mentioned robbing a taxi. He reportedly said: "I suggested we go and jump a taxi driver. Some mates of mine had done it before and it worked" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). In their first robbery of a taxi driver, it was Jason who grabbed the money but both boys held knives to the driver's neck. In the second robbery, Jason reportedly turned up at Tom's place and suggested they repeat the success of their first robbery a week earlier. Both boys agreed that this time it was Tom's turn to make the demand that the driver hand over the money.

It would appear that Tom did not feel confident about being allocated the lead role in the second armed robbery. According to Jason, they waited for a whole hour at the taxi rank before Tom spotted a driver whom he thought would be easy to rob (*Age*, 21 November 1995). Jason said in his police statement that Tom told him that cutting of the driver's throat was due to him accelerating so the taxi lurched forward, causing the knife to fly back (*Age*, 8 December 1995). However, the prosecutor rejected this possibility, saying, "Expert evidence suggested that the wounds on the neck could have been caused that way, but it was improbable" (*Age*, 7 June 1996), and thus he charged Tom with murder, not manslaughter. *The Age* reported: 'Taxi killing: boy sent for trial on murder' (*Age*, 9 December 1995).

The rationale for Tom being portrayed as the "bad boy" by the media is not readily apparent, particularly as it was Jason who had a record of delinquent or criminal behaviour. Jason had been on a bond for shoplifting; he had smashed every light globe in the residential unit where he had been placed, and, allegedly, he had "robbed cars at Fawkner Cemetery as mourners paid respects to the dead" (*Age*, 6 December 1995, 17 August 1996). However, it was reported that Jason had a family counsellor and this appeared to confirm that he was fundamentally a good boy who had gone astray. By seeking counselling, Jason demonstrated that he was trying to return to being a "normal" boy.

> *You have to keep in mind that this was the first time he had not been with his family: I think he became somewhat depressed, even suicidal. "He was very vulnerable at that stage. He doubted his own self-worth. In that state he would be fairly easily influenced"* (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995).

Both boys were "normal"

Neither of the boys was diagnosed as mentally ill so this criterion could not by used by the media to decide which one of them was most culpable. Reportedly, the judge, when sentencing Jason, noted that he did not suffer any "psychological illness or a psychiatric condition" (*Age*, 16 December 1995), and when sentencing Tom he said: "... you are of normal intelligence; you suffer from no psychological disability or psychiatric illness" (*Age*, 13 August 1996). It was also noted by the media that the boys were not drunk or on drugs when committing the two armed robberies (*Age*, 10 December 1995) so the issue of youth and drugs never emerged in this murder case. Clearly some other explanation than being crazy or being drugged had to be found by newspapers for Tom's and/or Jason's stabbing of a man who was a stranger to them and who had done them no harm.

When all court hearings had finished and journalists started to write feature articles on "children who kill", they ignored the judge's declaration that both were "normal" boys. An *Age* editorial commenting on the sentencing of Tom for this "abominable crime" said: "… some children will inevitably grow up with psychopathic and violently destructive tendencies" (*Age*, 14 August 1996). In this way the media pictured Tom as abnormal and planted the idea that there might be a possibility of psychiatric illness that had been overlooked. Similarly *The Australian* implied that Tom had a "murderous" personality by reporting the views of two experts:

> *Dr Lewis* [an American criminologist] *points out that juvenile murderers often have an extensive aggressive history antedating their homicidal acts … Ms Metcalf* [author of an article called 'Children Who Kill'] *contends that … many serial killers murder their first victim when they are juveniles* (17 August 1996).

Another in-depth article (*Weekend Australian*, 17–18 August 1996) reported the expert opinion of the head of the adolescent health unit at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital. This expert was of the opinion that a large number of young people suffer from "adolescent depression", and that such depression makes them "incredibly challenging, incredibly out-of-control, and incredibly dangerous". It is implied that this was true of Tom (and perhaps also Jason), although no evidence that Tom suffered from "adolescent depression" had emerged during the court hearings.

Perhaps journalists found the killing of the taxi driver so incomprehensible they could not think about it except in terms of a teenager who lacked the normal capacity to think and act. However, in the actual murder case, neither of the boys was able to claim diminished responsibility or temporary insanity. The question of which boy was the worst offender seemed to be decided by journalists on grounds of their appearance, behaviour and family background.

Tom's appearance and court demeanour were "bad"

After the sentencing of Jason, comments were made in newspapers about how the two boys were diametrically opposed in terms of appearance. At this stage of the court process, Jason had been sentenced for the lesser charge of manslaughter and Tom was to stand trial for murder. The following press statement implies that Jason had the look of innocence whereas Tom's appearance was evidence of his dangerous character: "Jason … is blonde and fair skinned with fleshy features … Tom [has] short, dark hair and thin, angular features" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). Similar comments were made (by a female journalist) after Tom's sentencing for murder: "[the] convicted killer is a skinny, short boy with cropped, jet black hair" (*Age*, 13 August 1996).

Besides their different appearances, newspaper articles drew attention to how the boys' manners in the courtroom were also very different, which was presumably important for deciding guilt and innocence. At Jason's sentencing hearing it was reported that he "… sat straightbacked in a dark suit … [and] stared blankly at the wall behind the magistrate … Tom [was] animated … laughed when the lawyers cracked a joke … looked at witnesses studiously as they gave their evidence" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). No mention was made of how Tom was dressed but presumably he was not wearing a suit like Jason because at Tom's own sentencing hearing, he was reported as wearing "a snappy, black bomber jacket buttoned up to the collar" (*Age*, 13 August 1996). It also was pointed out that Tom "often wore a mobile phone on his hip" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). According to journalists Tom did not take the juvenile justice system as seriously as he should. On the other hand Jason sat in silence with averted eyes, and during breaks in the hearing he reportedly exchanged "whispers" with his father. Tom's demeanour however, was reported to be the opposite:

Tom sat through the three-week committal with his mother, girlfriend and other relatives, with whom he talked and joked during breaks" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995).

At his own sentencing hearing, Tom displayed the same supposedly inappropriate behaviour:

> *He smiled at his family ... He leaned over the dock and grinned while his lawyer whispered to him* (*Age*, 13 August 1996).

While Jason was reported by the media as showing respect for the law by being serious and expressing sadness, Tom was presented as disrespectful of the court scene. His smiling, chatting and joking seem to have been interpreted as evidence not only of bad manners, but also of his lack of remorse. It is likely that the jury, judge and journalists expected the boys to break down and cry at crucial moments of the court process, but when Tom did not do so, comments were made about his lack of remorse. At the end of his committal hearing, it was reported that:

> *On Friday, the youngest boy charged with murder in Victoria stood up in the Children's Court, hands clasped behind his back. The boy bowed his head as the magistrate ordered him to stand trial [for murder] in the Supreme Court next year ... [he] answered firmly "Not guilty"* (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995).

On the day his sentence was pronounced, Tom was described as being on the verge of breaking down, but regained control of himself. Again this was seen as an indication of lack of remorse:

> *... the boy in the dock remained still, almost emotionless. But when the judge scolded him for having no remorse, his head began to shake slightly ... his trembling stopped ... As the jail term was announced the boy's pale face seemed to tighten for a moment but otherwise he remained impassive* (*Age*, 13 August 1996).

It appears that the media interpreted the fact that Tom did not break down at this point as evidence of him being hard, uncaring and unrepentant. Months later when the jury announced its guilty verdict, Tom's subsequent tears were not read as remorse. Instead, he was seen as concerned about going to an adult jail. If Tom cried out of remorse this was not to be read in the newspapers:

> *"[he] cried in his mother's arms yesterday as he heard ... he might be kept in [Pentridge] after January"* (*Age*, 10 August 1996).

A combination of Tom's physical appearance (dark hair and thin, angular features), his informal clothing and his behaviour in court worked against him. The press did not appear to canvass the possibility that Tom was contrite, nor that he believed it had been an accidental killing rather than murder. Thus on the basis of the boys' appearance and behaviour in court the press presented the view that Tom was of bad character while Jason was a good boy who had been led astray.

Depicting Tom's "bad" character

The inside-story articles published during the ten-month court hearing characterised Tom as a hardened 13-year-old. Headings and subheadings of these press articles communicated the message that Tom was a vicious boy. An *Age* article (13 August 1996) carried the headline: 'Childhood lost to jail for crime of no remorse'. Another *Age* article (17 August 1996) referred to the "callous nature" of the murder. Boys like Tom were described as "tearaways, wild, vengeful, society's outsiders". Similarly, *The Weekend Australian* (17–18 August 1996) used the phrase "cold-blooded killer" in its heading. Each article contained pieces of "evidence" to prove beyond doubt that Tom was evil.

The view that Tom was a vicious boy was expressed by the judge who presided over the court hearings of both Tom and Jason. A judgment of Tom's character was reported over and over again in newspapers. For example:

> *[The judge said] the death … was not premeditated or planned, but the boy's actions in killing him were deliberate and conscious. He said the boy inflicted terrible wounds … This is far removed from childish actions like rock-throwing; it is gravely criminal conduct … You have no remorse* (*Age*, 13 August 1996).

By contrast, when assessing Jason's character the judge reportedly commented that:

> *[Jason] had not intended or expected [the driver] would be injured, but should have foreseen it … but [he] was depressed and lonely at the time of the killing* (*Age*, 6 December 1995).

Such reports helped the media create the story that if Jason had not been taken away from his family and placed in a welfare home, then he would not have participated in an armed robbery. No similar explanation was offered for Tom's willingness to participate in the armed robbery despite the fact that he had repeatedly run away from the welfare home to be reunited with his mother.

The negative portrayal of Tom occurred from the first day of hearings, taking on added force after Jason had pleaded guilty to manslaughter and his lawyer started to plead for a lenient sentence. Newspapers reported how Jason's lawyer told the court that Tom was the kind of boy "the community should have very real concerns about, even at the age of 13" (*Age*, 10 December 1995), and he called upon witnesses to testify that Jason's essentially good character was the opposite of Tom's. It was reported that Jason's lawyer "painted a picture of a sensitive, intelligent boy who had 'run off the rails'"(*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). To make a mistake is quite different from being a threat to society, and Tom was seen as the threat because although he was "the younger boy" (repeatedly pointed out in articles although it was only one year's difference), he had leadership skills to make teenagers like Jason partake in criminal and murderous activities. In a press article that was headed 'Lawyer says ringleader was 13-year-old boy', it was reported that Jason's lawyer said:

> *[Tom] was the prime mover in both offences … [he] was the leader in every respect in the killing and in the earlier armed robbery of another taxi driver* (*Age*, 1 December 1995).

There was extensive coverage of the prosecutor's comments about Tom's bad character and this added to the media's already negative portrayal of him. On the last day of Tom's committal hearing, the prosecutor reportedly told the court that Tom had carried out the crimes with "coldness and callousness" (*Age*, 9 December 1995), and on the first day of Tom's murder trial, the prosecutor reportedly said "the murder had been carried out with particular savagery and a disregard for human life" (*Age*, 7 June 1996). In addition, Jason's lawyer dealt with Tom's unblemished past with the statement "Tom seems to have gone straight into the Test arena (of crime) without [first] playing in the school team" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December

1995). This suggests that Tom had emerged as a full-blown hardened criminal while partaking in his second attempt to "jump a taxi".

Some remarkable evidence of Tom's badness was reported by the media. Many newspapers mentioned that Tom had once told Jason that he "wanted to commit every major crime" (*Age*, 1 December 1995); or he "would do every major crime" (*Age*, 10 December 1995). This statement, made by his co-accused, was apparently treated as reliable proof of Tom's inherent badness. Another piece of "evidence" came from the headmaster of Tom's former primary school. He recalled Tom as "a bright, intelligent and athletic boy, but one who was aggressive and prone to fighting as early as age seven" (*Sunday Age*, 18 August 1996). Much import was also placed on statements made by a youth worker who told the court: "Tom was challenging ... I was powerless to control him" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). One example he gave of Tom being an uncontrollable boy occurred soon after Tom had moved into a residential unit. In this incident, Tom was told by the youth worker to end a phone call, which made Tom so angry that "he had a large kitchen knife and held me at bay demanding I open the office so he could get some personal items". At another time, Tom refused to leave the room used as an office so the youth worker reportedly tried to push him out, whereupon Tom "stabbed me [with a pencil] in the right palm" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). This led to a visit to the doctor and the police were called in to give Tom a warning. The youth worker's story was told during Jason's sentencing hearing and repeated in almost every subsequent newspaper article.

There was other evidence that could have been used to refute the assumption that Tom was innately bad, but only Richard Yallop of *The Weekend Australian* used it in a feature article after Tom had been sentenced to imprisonment in a jail for adult criminals. Yallop wrote about the psychologist's court report on Tom, which had not been mentioned in other news reports. The psychologist had given a favourable report on Tom: he had "intellectual capacity"; he was "a very cooperative individual and a person who has reflected some sensitivity to others"; his toughness was seen as more apparent than real, merely a "defence mechanism" (*Weekend Australian*, 17–18 August 1996). Another piece of information included here but not elsewhere was: "Protection workers say that [Tom] was sometimes aggressive, challenging what limits were placed on him, but he was not generally considered violent."

This article in the *The Weekend Australian* was unusual; more typical was the kind of analysis provided in a feature article in *The Sunday Age* (18 August 1996) where Tom was described as so bad that he was unable to take advantage of opportunities for rehabilitation. In this article, it was apparent that Tom was helped, but he was unhelpable.

> *The system may have failed Tom, but individuals within it tried to give him every chance. At the beginning of 1995, Tom's social worker had him enrolled at a northern suburbs high school. The department provided money for a school uniform, tracksuit and fees ... Tom went to school for the first two days of the year ... On Monday, he did not turn up for school. Again* (*Sunday Age*, 18 August 1996).

Tom played at being a man

Part of Tom's badness was seen to result from the caricature that he played of an adult man. The most shocking evidence of Tom acting as a man rather than a child was that he fathered a child while being tried for murder. This was given prominent media coverage:

> *The boy, who became a father on the third day of the trial* (*Weekend Australian*, 27–28 July 1996).
>
> (Headline) *'At 14, he's a convicted murderer. At 16, she's the mother of his child'* (*Sunday Age*, 18 August 1996).

A phrase often used when portraying Tom was that he was "out of control", as in the following newspaper headings: 'Young and out of control' (*Weekend Australian*, 17–18 August 1996); 'Out of control: the [taxi-driver's name] killer' (*Age*, 17 August 1996).

One might surmise that Tom was seen as uncontrollable because he challenged his child status. As mentioned earlier, youth workers described Tom as "challenging", meaning that he disliked being told how to behave or what to do by residential staff acting as substitute parents, although they were often only ten years older than himself.

Much also was made of the fact that Tom absconded many time from the residential unit. One newspaper said he absconded "26 times in two years" (*Sunday Age*, 18 August 1996), another said "27 times in three-and-a-half years" (*Age*, 10 October 1996) and another "37 times in three-and-a-half years" (*Age*, 17 August 1996). While it was suggested in some reports that that he wandered about with criminal intent, *The Sunday Age* article claimed that "most of the times he had absconded to visit his family". This would fit with the information already provided that Tom was not taken into care because he was a bad boy; he was taken into care because "his mother could not cope". Tom felt responsible for his family. One newspaper, and the only one to mention it, pointed out that Tom took on adult responsibilities at the time when his parents separated:

> *At six [Tom] who was one of five children, and the eldest boy, found himself acting the role of father figure within the family ... his sense of needing to care for his mother in particular* (*Weekend Australian*, 17–18 August 1996).

His brother, aged nine, told the court: "Tom had virtually acted as his father because his real father had not been around" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). It seems that Tom had also been a father figure to Jason even though he was a year younger than Jason. The reports suggested that having been taken away from his family, Tom formed a new family with Jason and Jane (the future mother of his child), with himself as head of the family. In this matter he again challenged his child status.

It may well have been that Tom found himself in situations of "acting well beyond his age" and perhaps he no longer saw himself as a child but as an adult male. Tom acted tough and simulated adult behaviour. He fathered a child, did not break down and cry (he was on the verge of tears, but regained control of himself), challenged parental substitutes, became a "father" for Jason and a "husband" for Jane. The judge sentenced him to a prison for adult criminals and gave him a long prison term. The media by and large supported the sentence, although a well known social commentator described it as "severe if not savage" (*Australian*, 13 August 1996). On the last day of Tom's committal hearing the prosecutor was quoted as telling the court:

> *The planning and execution of the crimes show a maturity and a sophistication well beyond his age ... He showed clear determination to obtain the weapon, pick his mark, pick the location, to bring along a change of clothes, to conceal the weapon, cover his tracks and keep people quiet* (*Age*, 9 December 1995).

The selection and reporting of this particular comment, instead of all the other statements made by the prosecutor on that day, suggest that reporters were anxious to encourage readers to see Tom as an adult, rather than a child criminal.

Tom's family was "bad"

In addition to taking on adult status, Tom's final undoing, according to the media, was to have come from a bad family. Tom's family was seen as dysfunctional and the members unwilling or unable to help themselves. Jason's family was portrayed as good, albeit with a few problems that were being addressed. Jason had been placed in care in July 1994 on the advice of the family counsellor because "problems in Jason's family had become irreconcilable" (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995). The article went on to report that the family was taking remedial action by having therapy sessions and Jason's father "believed they were progressing towards a solution". Jason was cross-examined for four hours but "he refused to answer questions about his family problems". As a result there was less material available about Jason's family, which meant journalists judged the family on the basis of what they observed during the court proceedings. Both Jason's and Tom's parents visited the court during the trial. This attendance by Jason's parents was portrayed by *The Sunday Age* (10 December 1995) as an example of them being supportive and of Jason as the loving child:

> *Each day Jason appeared in court, his own parents were by his side, hugging him during breaks and whispering assurances ... During breaks in the hearing, he would rest his head on the left shoulder of his father, who would stroke his hair and whisper to him.*

In contrast Tom's family members were portrayed unsympathetically. They did not sit beside him in court and comfort him, they "flanked" him. The use of this word conjures up images of aggression:

> *Tom was flanked in court by his mother and his girlfriend, Jane, who would sit next to him holding his hand. Others turned up to support him including his father, some of his brothers and sisters, and his social workers. The police officer in charge of the case said in evidence that one of Tom's group – his uncle – was ordered to stay away from the court by police after a complaint that he was intimidating witnesses* (*Sunday Age*, 10 December 1995).

Even though it was unsubstantiated, *The Sunday Age* reported that Jason's lawyer suggested that Tom's family was responsible for arson attacks on Jason's house. "Although there was no direct evidence that Tom's family or associates were responsible, [Jason's lawyer] said Jason's family knew of no other person who would have a motive for such attacks."

It was reported also in *The Sunday Age* (10 December 1995) that Tom came from a large family and for financial reasons spent several years in and out of welfare homes, as did some of his brothers and sisters. It was reported that with the birth of Tom's child: "the third generation is well on the way to dysfunction" (*Sunday Age*, 18 August 1996). Tom's mother grew up in a family of eight children, she saw some of her brothers taken into welfare care only to end up in jail. She told the court that she had been thrown out of home at 14 because her mother could not cope. By the age of 20 she was pregnant with Tom, her third child. When her relationship with Tom's father broke up in 1987 she had five children; her three boys were taken into care. Tom's father went on to have four more children by a new relationship, after which time he was reunited with Tom's mother. The picture that is presented is a cycle of deprivation in which Tom and his family were trapped, being either unwilling or unable to escape.

Overall, the press articles about this case support the impression that young people involved in serious crime come from dysfunctional families. A barrister was reported to have said, "Nearly every kid I have defended (on homicide charges) has come from a broken or unbelievably dysfunctional family" (*Sunday Age*, 24 April 1996). There is also the implication that children who end up in state care because of family difficulties are at risk of committing violent crimes.

It is easy to conclude from reading the newspaper reports of a murder of the taxi driver that Tom and Jason both represented youth as a "threat" and as "victim". While Jason was portrayed as being easily led and therefore able to be reformed, Tom was seen as evil and therefore needed to be punished severely. However, on the evidence presented it is hard to justify the assumption that Tom was any more dangerous or evil than Jason; he may have been less lucky and probably panicked when things did not go as planned. There is no evidence that either of them were suffering from a psychiatric or psychological illness. Editorials, however, still implied that Tom had "psychopathic and violent tendencies" and thus his actions could not have been done by a "normal" young person (*Age*, 14 August 1996). In addition, he had too many of those attributes that are associated with stereotypical images of bad children. His dark features, his lack of remorse, his claim to adult status, his chaotic and large family all were used to build up an image of a bad boy.

While the research confirms the "threat" and "victim" categories, it also suggests two new categories that are refinements of both of these: the ringleader and the easily led, with the ringleader having evil intent.

Genée Marks and Sandy Cook

Disabling images

Young people, print media and the law

THERE IS AN ancient Chinese parable that goes something like this. There was once a man who noticed that his axe was missing and presumed that it had been stolen. Immediately, he suspected the youthful son of his nearest neighbour of having taken the axe. After all, the boy had all the time in the world, and probably knew where the axe was kept. What is more, he was a strange lad. The more the man looked at the boy, the greater was his conviction. The youth walked like a thief and talked like a thief. How could it have been anyone else? Some time later, the man discovered his axe, possibly behind the wood pile where it was last used. Suddenly, he noticed his neighbour's son no longer behaved like a thief (Cleary 1993, p.67).

Our preconceptions and misconceptions frequently lead us to make assumptions that may well be unjust. This is especially so if those we suspect are different in any way from ourselves. We may see long hair as indicative of the thief. Similarly, we may fear withdrawn behaviour, indistinct speech, the limp, or inexplicable rage. If people do not respond to situations in the way we would like them to, then we feel unsafe. So often, our choice has been to lock away those we fear most, whether they be convicted criminals or innocent victims. The woman who hears voices coming from the toaster is seen as equally dangerous and in need of incarceration as the man who shoots his girlfriend with a cross-bow, then has sexual intercourse with her while she is dying. In both cases, "discipline", in the Foucauldian sense, is brought to bear (Foucault 1977, p.215).

In recent years, there has been a move within Australian society to deinstitutionalise those with disabilities, and allow them to live within the community of which they are rightly part. In effect, within social policy, there has been a move away from the state as disciplining those who are different. Yet within Australia we continue to both discipline and punish those people whom we regard as disabled. We have valorised a kind of corporeal imperialism, that validates the way we view disability and difference. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the media.

The public construction of disability

"The history of the portrayal of disabled people is the history of oppressive and negative representation. This has meant that disabled people have been presented as socially flawed able bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identities" (Hevey, in Barnes 1992, p.4). Seldom has the construction of disability been favourable. Consider the construction of disability within literature: Quasimodo, Don Quixote and Tiny Tim are just a few bad, mad or sad figures that spring to mind. Similarly, children's literature continues to convey to the young that people with disabilities are different, and either to be feared or treated with caution. Even Snow White had to be convinced that the Seven Dwarfs were not going to harm her, and characters such as Captain Hook have done much to generate images of people with disabilities as dangerous.

In a document designed to empower the social movement of people with disabilities in Britain, Barnes (1992) noted nearly a dozen different representations of disability that are commonly seen in the media. Briefly, these are: "the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic", such as "The Elephant Man", the call for charity, and the reference to "sufferers" of various disabilities; "the disabled person as an object of violence", including the arguments for eugenics (or mercy killing as we prefer to call it), abandonment, victims of violent crimes, and suicides; "the disabled person as sinister and evil", a description often given to people experiencing schizophrenia and other bipolar disorders; "the disabled person as atmosphere or curio", such as the existence of Freak Shows, and our fascination with the task of separating conjoined twins; "the disabled person as super cripple", whether they be artist, lawyer, athlete or brave and plucky child; "the disabled person as an object of ridicule", such as stutterers and people with facial tics; "the disabled person as their own worst and only enemy", a description often applied to people with HIV/AIDS; "the disabled person as burden", which is a stereotype that is so common it is hardly even worth describing; "the disabled person as sexually abnormal", either impotent or over-sexed; "the disabled person as incapable of participating fully in community life", which is commonly used as an excuse for the inadequate provision of services, and the removal into custody of the children of mothers with disabilities; and finally, "the disabled person as normal", which, while often governed by good intent, may include denial of disability and all that it implies, or a reversion to tokenism.

Such a litany of representations has a contrived resonance in contemporary Australian society. It is true, however, to argue that Australia has a rich public history of representing people with disabilities as bad, mad or sad. Edwards and Wearing (1994), in their documentation of the constructions of disability in the NSW press since the late nineteenth century, note that the "development of media imagery is contingent upon the institutional conditions of the time such as levels and forms of service provision, the role of the family and the levels of informal care and state intervention" (p.11). Edwards and Wearing note the tendency of the Australian media to "criminalise disability" (p.16), by constructing people with disabilities as criminal, irrespective of whether they are perpetrator or victim. While this may commonly be the case, it will be seen from the cases highlighted in this chapter that other constructions of disability are also ubiquitous in the Australian media.

Young people and the media

The representation of young people in the media is seldom unproblematic. Like the youth in the Chinese parable, young people are often seen as likely perpetrators of crimes against property, the person and the state. Youth is constructed as unruly, defiant and out of control. The very existence of young people is often regarded as threatening. In short, media representations suggest escalating youth problems, including rampant drug use and violent behaviour, especially against innocent victims. Rarely are "good news stories" about young people reported in the press. The popular conception, fostered by the media, is that a decline in standards and degrees of discipline has led to a situation where young people are seen as a threat to the safety and stability of society. More exaggerated still is the threat of young people who have disabilities. Regarded as doubly threatening, they are readily constructed as doubly "Other", a threat to the natural and moral order.

The media appears to have a morbid fascination with disability, especially as it relates to young people. While all varieties of media warrant scrutiny, for the purposes of this discussion the focus will be on print media. Several themes emerge in the following discussion, which specifically addresses the representation of youth with disability in Melbourne daily papers over a three-year period. These themes include: the threat posed by deinstitutionalisation; silences and lacunae in the press; innocent victims; the dangerous Other; the primacy of bodily perfection; sexual abnormality and threat; and the disabled as burden. Of interest in this discussion are three groups of young people with disability who become linked with issues of law and order: those who become victims of individual crimes; those who perpetrate crimes themselves; and finally, those who are violated against by the state.

As the print media are examined, it will become clear that: "The media do not simply and transparently report events which are 'naturally' newsworthy *in themselves*. 'News' is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories" (Hall et al. 1978, p.53). What will become increasingly obvious, too, is that: "Commonly, disability appears to be dealt with in a negative and second-hand way in these [news] reports. The central characters of these reports are criminalised and their identities then associated with some disability, usually in the form of mental illness" (Edwards & Wearing 1994, p.15). If young people were not constructed as "Other" prior to the newsworthy event, they frequently became so during the process of reportage.

Disability and sexual assault

The case of Dominic Simm received considerable attention in the print media in Melbourne during 1994. The coverage is particularly interesting, because the representation of Dominic, even before the trial, was as a perpetrator of the crime. Dominic, a young man in his twenties, has autism, and as with many people affected by this disorder, Dominic finds it very difficult to initiate or maintain physical contact with other people. For this reason alone, that he was accused of the digital penetration of two primary schoolgirls is notable in itself. The girls, aged five and six, went to the toilet during lesson time in a Melbourne primary school. It was alleged that while they were there, they encountered a man who penetrated them digitally. The girls reported the attack to the school as soon as they returned from the toilet block, but the police took several hours to respond to the school's request for support.

Dominic Simm was a well known local identity, who frequently roamed the neighbourhood at all hours of the day and night. It is likely that many local people, including school children, were familiar with his face. It is indicative of the sort of moral panic frequently fed by the media about people with disabilities who are not incarcerated, that police quickly apprehended Dominic at the request of a local shopkeeper. Dominic was questioned by police, with (as required by law) an independent third person present.

When presented with a videotaped line-up that included Dominic, not one of the witnesses positively identified him as the young man they saw leave the toilet block. One witness remarked: "I got the impression from the way he walked, moved, and the way he was looking over the fence, that he may have been retarded" (*Age*, 26 June 1994, p.6). A local businessman, however, who had known Dominic Simm for some time, and had also witnessed the offender leaving the school noted: "I cannot say that the person I saw was not Dominic Simm. However, I would have thought that I would have recognised Dominic from the distance that I saw the male that day" (*Age*, 26 June, 1994).

Significantly, a nine-year-old witness observed: "He looks like No. 5 a bit (*Age*, 26 June 1994, p.6). This last identification was raised in court as a positive identification, but its veracity was questioned (*Age*, 16 March 1994). When *The Age* reported on this initially, it was claimed: "A schoolboy identified an intellectually disabled man in a video line-up as the one who raped two girls." Yet in the next sentence, they noted: "However, the boy, 9, admitted that the man identified ... might not have been the one he saw ..." (*Age*, 16 March 1994). Bearing in mind that the newspaper articles were reporting on a trial that found Dominic innocent, even after his acquittal, they are structured in a way that strongly suggests that the young man seen leaving the toilets *may* have been Dominic.

Dominic Simm was eventually acquitted simply "because there was no evidence against him" (*Age*, 26 June 1994, p.12), and because the County Court judge ruled Simm's questioning by police as unfair, and the evidence as inadmissible. "Shortly before acquitting and discharging Dominic Michael Mark Simm, Judge McNab ruled that Mr Simm did not understand his rights in relation to police questioning, and as a result, his taped record of interview was unfair and could not be admitted as evidence in his trial" (*Age*, 18 June 1994, p.1). It is worth noting that this verdict pushed the story back onto the front page of the newspaper. However, the headline did not suggest Dominic was innocent. Rather, it claimed: 'Judge throws out child sex case' (*Age*, 18 June 1994, p.1). This strongly suggests that Dominic was still being seen as a perpetrator who was acquitted only because of a technicality.

As the reports went on, a shift was evident in the way Dominic was represented. It was shown that the evidence from the interviews with police conflicted both with the evidence Dominic gave at the trial, and the actual facts of the case. It was clear that Dominic was talking about quite a different event, but was also eager to please the police (or perhaps he was hoping that they would leave him alone if he said what they wanted). "In a report to the court, Dr Glaser [consultant psychiatrist] said that on three occasions Dominic clearly showed he was unable to provide a correct interpretation of the police caution and that, in all three interviews, clearly offered contradictory and inconsistent responses" (*Age*, 26 June 1994, p.6). The headlines began to construct Dominic as a victim: 'INNOCENT – But Dominic is still a victim' (*Age*, 26 June 1994); and 'Parents, police fear disabled are put at risk' (*Age*, 26 June 1994, p.5).

Importantly, however, Dominic Simm was not released after his acquittal, but was placed in a secure unit for convicted offenders and those unfit to plead, and a number of comments published in the media described him as a "third victim of that crime" (*Age*, 26 June 1994, p.12) Simm, who was described on several occasions as "'a pigeon in human form' whose single joy in life is to wander" (*Age*, 26 June, 1994, p.6) was, after the trial, represented as a victim, whereas prior to the trial he was viewed as both dangerous and a burden. The response to his incarceration after the trial was mixed. "Why is he there?" a Health and Community Services worker close to Dominic's case asked. "It's a 24-hour lock-up. It's an outrage that he's even here today. It's a deprivation of his liberty, as simple as that. HACS is planning for Dominic's future on the basis that he is guilty but that he somehow got off on a technicality. They are scared of the publicity if he goes back on the streets" (*Age*, 26 June 1994, p.6).

Whether Dominic Simm is represented as a dangerous Other, wild and undisciplined, who may be seen as a threat to law and order, or whether he is constructed as an innocent victim, denied adequate stimulation, who was wrongfully charged is irrelevant in the public eye. Either way he must be disciplined. He does not conform to conventional perceptions of a man in his twenties. The media called for a stop to "the revolving door of aimlessness" (*Age*, 25 June 1994a, p.17) for people with disability. Either way he is a threat to the smooth passage of time and space in the community. Indeed, if the "objectification of the criminal as outside the law, as natural man, is still only a potentiality, a vanishing trace, in which are entangled the themes of political criticism and the figures of the imagination" (Foucault 1977, p.102), then Dominic Simm may well be that vanishing trace.

The spectre of disability

All too frequently, it is not an actual disability, but the spectre of disability that the police, the media, and the community fear. Crimes against people, rather than property, are frequently linked, in the media, with disability, even though there may be little, or dubious evidence. This was the case with a 14-year-old boy who was charged with the murder of a woman who was stabbed during a robbery. It was often stressed during the final stages of the trial that the boy's IQ "was just above being intellectually disabled" (*Age*, 29 July 1994, p.12). The boy did not have an intellectual disability, and fell into the intelligence range of about half the population. Yet this point was mentioned in the media regularly.

Eventually, the boy was acquitted of murder as the evidence was rejected by the court as circumstantial:

> *The judge said … there were significant gaps in the evidence. If the jury concluded that the boy was in the house, it would have to conclude there was no evidence about what happened between him and Mrs Peters when she was wounded … He said there was no evidence about what happened between the two people except that there was a confrontation. He said there was no evidence about a weapon except an inference that it must have been sharp* (*Age*, 26 July 1994, p.8).

Once again the value of the intervention of the independent third person (who in this case was called because a minor was involved) was challenged, and the videotaped record of interview was ruled inadmissible. The judge argued that the boy "was probably induced to answer questions by an independent person called to help him. The independent person said: 'I tried to explain to him that if he didn't tell the truth to me, he couldn't tell the truth to anybody, and that I couldn't go in to bat for him if he hadn't told the truth'" (*Age*, 29 July 1996, p.2). The judge felt that this may have influenced the evidence (*Age*, 29 July 1996).

Despite the fact that the boy may very likely have killed an innocent woman in her own home, he was still cast as innocent victim, and was sentenced to three years' detention in a youth training centre. The sentencing judge noted "that the community had an interest in his rehabilitation, which should be given priority. He said the boy's intelligence level was just above being intellectually disabled, and he had had a horrific background in which he witnessed and experienced violence by his father …" (*Age*, 17 September 1994, p.7).

Frequently, too, the spectre of psychiatric disability provokes both community and police fear of the dangerous Other. This has been made all too clear in the high incidence of people with psychiatric disability who have been shot and killed by police in Victoria. These people are frequently represented as the threat posed by deinstitutionalisation. In one 24-hour period in 1994, Victorian police actually killed two people with mental illness, despite the fact that neither appeared to be a real threat to anyone other than themselves. In one case, a father called police because he was concerned that his son, who was mentally ill, was self-mutilating. The police over-reacted and killed the young man (*Australian*, 8–9 January 1994, p.6).

Although such killings certainly caused the community to question the training of police to deal with such situations, there was also considerable emphasis on the failure of the system to adequately support people with mental illness, either in institutions, or in the community. Whatever the perspective, however, the responses were tinged with fear of the dangerous Other. After one such shooting it was reported that the State Coroner observed that police "needed help in dealing with violent people who had psychiatric histories or personality disorders". He continued: "With the increasing number of persons with psychiatric (or psychological) related problems being integrated into the community it is important to develop structures to assist police in managing potentially dangerous incidents" (*Age*, 8 February 1995).

The apparent increase in incidents involving people with mental illness provoked a storm of fear and outrage across the State. Arguments that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" (*Age*, 6 January 1994) abounded, and many journalists and letters to the editor asked "why there are increasing numbers of disturbed people not being adequately contained within the health and community services" (*Age*, 6 January 1994, p.10). Even the Federal Human Rights Commissioner, Brian Burdekin argued that: "While I'm not excusing any excessive use of force, I think the police are increasingly in a very difficult situation in trying to respond to people who need care by mental health professionals, not by law enforcement officers" (*Weekend Australian*, 8–9 January 1994, p.6).

Yet at the same time, it seems people with mental illness were "subjected to criticism from members of the legal profession implying, derisively, that they are legal malingerers. One patient was told by a legal-aid solicitor that the courts are sick and tired of people who seek consideration on the grounds of psychiatric illness. A second patient was told by a magistrate that next time he would not be able to hide behind his illness" (*Age*, 26 June 1994).

Young people with mental illness, then, are seen as particularly threatening to the community "because of widespread community fears and misunderstandings of mental illness" (Hearn 1993). This, combined with the popular idea of "youth" as inherently irresponsible and dangerous, tends to position this group as a threat to the social order. As Hearn (1993, p.31) remarks: "A preoccupation with the 'dangerous' and 'disordered' offender have in part been responsible. These images of 'dangerousness' have been further propagated and elaborated by the media" (Hearn 1993). Despite calls for widespread services, however, the community, with support from the media, continues to react with fear at the thought of mental illness.

As reported in the *Melbourne Times*, the Victorian State Government, for example, proposed to build a high security institution for the criminally insane. However, the community responded with panic: "Yarra Bend Park Trust has rejected a plan to house the criminally insane at Yarra Bend Park ... The trust members called the high-tech institution for the criminally insane "a blight on the surrounding parkland and river environs" (*Melbourne Times*, 1 March 1995). At the same time, readers of *The Age* learned that Victorians with mental illness were "being denied access to general hospitals, according to a report by Catholic Social Services and the People Together Project ... The *Access to Psychiatric Care* report, released yesterday, calls on the State Government to stop further bed closures in hospitals and institutions until an independent inquiry investigates the availability of beds for the mentally ill" (*Age*, 31 March 1995, p.4).

The bogey of deinstitutionalisation

The Dominic Simm case also highlighted the dilemmas raised about deinstitutionalisation. Simm's family had been maintaining a long-running campaign for the provision of a "full-time structured activities program" to provide rewarding work for Dominic during the day (*Age*, 25 June 1994, p.5). When Dominic was arrested, and then acquitted, a hornet's nest was exposed. Comments in the media typically discussed the plight of families caring for their disabled children at home, and on the limited amount of community care available. "The Simm's case has shown how strained the care of young disabled people has become. There is almost universal support for deinstitutionalisation and community care of the disabled. Many disabled people are receiving adequate support. But advocates and parent groups say the quality of the service is under increasing pressure. The gap between the ideal and the real seems to be growing" (*Age*, 25 June 1994, p.17).

Very recently, *The Age* newspaper ran a series of articles focusing on 'Victoria's Forgotten People'. This series addressed the situation of the 40,000 Victorians with intellectual disability (*Age*, 13 May 1996). This series was concerned with institutionalisation, and presented discussion about people trying to get into (and out of) institutions. The newspaper made extensive use of large photographs and close-ups of people with intellectual disability. This strategy was employed, presumably to provoke emotional responses. The photographs appear to have been selected to elicit pathos: adult Pauline, sucking her fingers, and looking appropriately vacant (*Age*, 13 May 1996); Maggie relying on the services of a visiting clinical nurse (*Age*, 17 May 1996); and Michael having his head supported by his elderly mother (*Age*, 16 May 1996). Significantly, in all photographs, there was an overriding representation of the child-like dependent, irrespective of chronological age. There was little to challenge perceptions of the disabled as burden, and much to reinforce that image.

The concerns in the media about deinstitutionalisation focused on the need for more extensive community services to keep the undisciplined law-breakers off the streets. It was argued that a shortage of programs meant that large numbers of people with disabilities wandered the streets, committing "minor offences" (*Age*, 25 June 1994, p.5). The press further contended that people with disabilities have been taught they have the same sort of rights as other people, but that "nobody has ever taught them how to behave and survive in the wider social world. Shoplifting, trespassing, causing a public nuisance and assault are some of the common incidents that police are dealing with" (*Age*, 25 June 1994, p.17). These young people have been constructed as a potential danger to other young people using public facilities.

Yet other groups continued to argue that "intellectually disabled tenants were being denied many basic rights, despite the State Government's process of deinstitutionalisation which was meant to bring them into the community and improve their lifestyles" (*Age*, 2 February 1995). Certainly, the clash between this position, and those who believe that people with disabilities "irritate people on the street ... frighten people and some are sliding further and further into the criminal justice system. The police and the courts have story after story of people who come to their attention because they've got nothing to do during the day" (*Age*, 25 June 1994). As Foucault (1977) indicated:

> *... the guilty person is only one of the targets of the potentially guilty. For punishment is directed above all at others, at all the potentially guilty. So these obstacle-signs that are gradually engraved in the representation of the condemned man must therefore circulate rapidly and widely; they must be accepted and redistributed by all; they must shape the discourse that each individual has with*

> *others and by which crime is forbidden to all by all – the true coin that is substituted in people's minds for the false profits of crime* (p.108).

Violations by the state against young people with disability

Discussions in the media about deinstitutionalisation rarely focus on the significant issue of incarceration because of disability. Young people with disabilities are frequently violated against by the state, and yet little accountability exists in relation to government agencies. According to a Victorian report (*Age*, 14 May 1996), rape and sexual abuse of residents with disabilities by staff members within institutions are considered to be quite common, but are rarely reported. Other reports in the media mention that "powerful mood-altering drugs are being overused and improperly prescribed to control intellectually disabled people in state institutions and community houses" (*Age*, 14 May 1996, p.1), yet there was seldom any follow-up of such cases of state violations against people with disabilities.

A case that deserves some consideration, and one in which the media chose to generate public outrage, is that of the fire that killed a number of men with intellectual disability at Kew Cottages, in suburban Melbourne. Nine men, who were sleeping in a locked dormitory, died in a fire that ought never to have happened. The men were unsupervised at the time. That the incident occurred at Kew Cottages is not particularly surprising. However, media reports suggest that the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade had been issuing warnings about the poor fire safety of such institutions for some time. One news story began: "Hundreds of reports highlighting fire risks in privately run homes for the intellectually disabled ... have been shelved by the Department of Health and Community Services" (*Age*, 15 May 1996). The article claims that the reports were shelved "after the department discovered there was no legal obligation to enforce their recommendations" (*Age*, 15 May 1996).

The media were certainly effective in generating public outrage, in this case against the State of Victoria, rather than against the victims of the abuse. One concerned resident, in a letter to the editor of *The Age*, wrote "we need to have a royal commission into management of the now named Department of Human Services!" (*Age*, 15 May 1996, p.36). Another letter to the editor argued: "Instrumentalities of the community must no longer congregate people with disabilities with the lowest staff numbers possible for others' convenience. We should be ashamed that people have died in a most obvious way, while also appreciating that the systematic neglect of people also takes a toll in lives, only more slowly. Let us be motivated to do better" (*Age*, 16 May 1996).

Yet another way that the state violates the rights and bodies of young people with disabilities is through the legalisation of non-therapeutic sterilisation. Throughout history, eugenics, and other attempts to control the reproduction and continued existence of people with disabilities has been an ongoing concern. The non-therapeutic sterilisation of young people with disabilities is an issue that regularly gains some publicity. Certainly, it "is a minefield of medical, legal and social considerations" (*Age*, 3 June 1994, p.36). Interestingly, this only ever seems to be an issue that relates to young women. Parents do not seek to have their disabled sons sterilised. Recently, the issue of non-therapeutic sterilisation was brought before the High Court in Australia. Despite individual State laws supporting or proscribing such medical disciplining of bodies, the High Court brought down a decision that overrides State laws in this context.

Following the decision, *The Age* reported: "On the one hand is the principle of respect for personal bodily integrity – that every person's body is inviolate, except to save life or prevent serious damage to the person's health. On the other is the belief that it is sometimes in the best interests of an intellectually disabled child to be sterilised" (*Age*, 3 June 1994, p.36). Of interest to this debate is that the High Court decided in favour of permitting non-therapeutic abortions. However, Redfern Legal Service condemned such procedures, arguing that: "We do not agree that there should be two rules – one which applies to people with an intellectual disability and one which applies to everyone else. We believe that 'necessary to save life or prevent serious damage to health' is the most useful way to distinguish between therapeutic and non-therapeutic operations" (*Age*, 3 June 1994, p.36).

Frequently, sterilisation of young women, though rarely, if ever, of young men, is called upon as a technique of control and power over noncompliant bodies. Young women may choose to be "promiscuous", or may be vulnerable to sexual abuse. Parents may fear that their daughters will have unwanted babies. Indeed, many parents of daughters with disabilities fear that they will choose to become mothers when they are not yet considered able to look after themselves. Further, there is often a fear that young women with disabilities will have babies with disabilities. For certain disabilities, the likelihood of this is quite high. However vexed this area of ethics may be, compulsory sterilisation does not confront the moral dilemmas it may entail.

Silences and lacunae

Young people with disabilities are more likely to be apprehended by police, more likely to be proceeded with, more likely to get sentenced, and to be given longer sentences. In prison, they are more likely to be exploited and less likely to receive education, training or be paroled. They are more likely to incriminate themselves in interviews. This may be a product of their overzealousness to please authority and a lack of understanding of police procedures. In addition they are excluded from life's main arenas, community involvement, and so on. Cook and Slee (1994) report that people with intellectual disabilities in Australia are three to four times more common in the penal population than they are in the community.

This over-representation of people with intellectual disabilities within the criminal justice system is carried over into the youthful population. No figures are cited for the prevalence of prisoners with mental illness, but it seems reasonable to assume that the disproportional representation would be even higher than for people with intellectual disability. While legislation is now in place to supposedly protect people with disabilities from discrimination, the law is extremely limited. Clearly, social change is necessary. However, it is difficult for social changes to come about when the media is constructing representations that work against social change and inclusion.

Interestingly, there is a lack of research and literature on the topic of young people with disabilities in relation to the law, especially in Australia. In many ways, the silences and lacunae are greater than the magnitude of any of the issues covered. However, it is apparent that the media marginalises minority groups, such as young people with disabilities, in order to reinforce hegemony (Hall et al. 1978). Since the media usually "represent the primary, and often the only, source of information about many important events and topics", and "because news is recurrently concerned with events which are 'new' or 'unexpected', the media are involved in the task of making comprehensible what we would term 'problematic reality'" (Hall et al. 1978, p.56). In other words, the media works to construct our perceptions of youth with disability.

If the media chooses to valorise young, attractive, wholesome, but otherwise disabled bodies, such as those of wheelchair athletes, then that is the perception people develop of disabled bodies. When confronted by bodies that are wasted, erratic or otherwise "unattractively" deformed, the community is horrified, and unable to fit those bodies into the dominant framework, much of which has been constructed and reinforced by the media. Clearly, the implication is that the worth of those bodies must be very low. Magazines, such as *Dolly* and *Girlfriend*, designed specifically for young people, are instrumental in developing and reinforcing the attitudes of youth to bodily perfection and imperfection, yet seldom even acknowledge the existence of anything other than the perfect young body.

Bad, mad, sad and dangerous

Through an examination of the ways young people with disability are constructed and represented in the print media in Australia, it becomes clear that there is a climate of uncertainty and fear surrounding disability, especially in young people. The perceived "wildness" of youth, combined with behaviours, intelligence or appearance that is generally different to the anticipated norm, works to generate perceptions that young people with disability are bad, mad or sad. Young people with disabilities are also often linked with issues of law and order. They may become victims of individual crimes, perpetuate crimes themselves, or may be violated against by the state.

Significantly, what the media does is enable the community to construct a shared perception of the dangerousness of the Other. With such shared perceptions, we reinforce the consensual nature of society.

> *We exist as members of one society because – it is assumed – we share a common stock of cultural knowledge with our fellow men: we have access to the same "maps of meanings". Not only are we able to manipulate these "maps of meanings" to understand events, but we have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, which these maps embody or reflect* (Hall 1978, p.55).

The print media, then, create "maps of meaning" with which members of society can charter their understanding of disability, particularly in relation to youth and the law. So often, as we have seen, young people with disabilities are represented as threat, or burden. Seldom do we read of the contributions they make to society. Until more is made in the media of the "normalness" and "usualness" of disability, we will continue to see young people with disability constructed as Other.

David Greason

"Look mum, no shirt!"
Media representations of young Nazis

THE PROBLEMS faced by the mainstream media in reporting the activities of "extremist" or marginalised political forms are often brought into stark focus when reporting on the extreme right, particularly its racist variant.

The Australian racist/conspiratorial right – or the "lunar right", as conservative commentator Gerard Henderson has dubbed it (to differentiate it from the National Civic Council, the RSL and the economic rationalist New Right) is made up of a number of small groupings that from time to time attract media attention, although rarely in any depth.[1] And while not suggesting that the mainstream media's coverage of far-left politics is particularly well-informed, the often theatrical nature of far-right politics – particularly its Nazi variant, and even more so when youth are involved – is an open invitation to sensationalist coverage.

Broadly speaking, the organised racist right in Australia can be divided into four categories: the rurals (dominated by the League of Rights), the national socialists (once dominated by National Action), the emigres (largely Eastern European fascist sympathisers) and the religious (i.e. small, fundamentalist Protestant sects and traditionalist Catholics, often motivated by anti-Semitism and/or millenarian conspiracy theories).[2]

This chapter concentrates on the second category, the national socialists. Although young people are to be found in the other groups, they tend to be the children of adult supporters. The level of activism in these groups is generally quite cautious and conservative, and some of these children have been known to drift into the national socialist camp, where they find a brand of political activism more suited to youthful exuberance.

Anecdotal evidence from studies of Australian national socialist politics (Harcourt 1973; Greason 1994) also indicates that most activists tend to be initially attracted in their late teens and early twenties. Harcourt profiled 11 members of the Australian National Socialist Party and the National Socialist Party of Australia: the oldest was 39, and had become involved in far-right politics at the age of 17 or 18; the average age of joining was 21.

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[1] See particularly Henderson's article 'Lunar Right Rising', *Good Weekend*, April 9 1994. The article was that week's cover story: as irony would have it, the coverline read 'The New Right Rises'.

[2] One such case is that of Michael Brander, the South Australian leader of National Action, who was introduced to far-right politics through his Spanish emigre mother's vocal and active support for the Franco regime, which included bringing young Michael on her self-generated pro-Franco protests in Adelaide. Brander is also a communicant (and a reputed one-time seminarian) in the schismatic Society of St Pius X, founded by the late Archbishop Lefebvre, who suspected that the Roman Catholic Church had been hijacked by godless Jews and Freemasons.

Many of the young people active in national socialist politics today are skinheads, members of a subcultural group that emerged in Britain in the 1960s among working-class youth as a breakaway from the mod movement. The short hair was meant to help them in street fights, both practically and aesthetically. In its early days, skinhead culture was not racist and paid homage to the West Indian presence in Britain through its adoption of "ska" music. In the 1970s, however, increasing numbers of white skinheads had gravitated towards the National Front, largely because of that party's articulation of *lumpen* concerns about immigration, housing and unemployment. By this stage, ska music had been replaced by "Oi!" music, a variation on punk that often extolled racist themes (Moore 1993, p.16; Knight 1982, p.31).

In Australia, media coverage of national socialist groups – particularly where skinheads are involved – has tended to concentrate on issues such as crime and deviance. Often this is because the specific story itself is primarily a crime or court story, with neo-Nazism thrown in as background colour. Four such stories are: 'Bid to oust neo-Nazis', (*Northcote Leader* (Melbourne), 10 November 1993); 'Security probe: Nazi pulls a knife in court', (*Age*, 21 December 1991); 'Neo-Nazi killer's jail escape plot', (*Sunday Herald Sun*, 19 January 1992); 'Court told of prison assault', (*Herald Sun*, 10 December 1992). The first three stories concern the alleged criminal behaviour of neo-Nazi skinhead youths, the fourth detailed an alleged assault by Pentridge Prison warders against a neo-Nazi skinhead youth.

This is not entirely inappropriate, however, given the history of the two major Australian national socialist outfits of recent times: National Action and the breakaway Australian Nationalists' Movement.

National Action was formed in Sydney in April 1982. Its founding leadership (including this writer) had histories of involvement in a number of far-right groups, from the League of Rights to the National Socialist Party of Australia (NSPA). Jim Saleam, then a University of Sydney student in his late twenties who soon became National Action's leader, was in 1975 barred by a Brisbane court from associating with the NSPA after he firebombed a Maoist bookshop (Greason 1994, p.152).

From 1984 onwards, most of the Sydney media's coverage of National Action's activities centred on allegations that National Action harassed its political opponents – at first leftists and "anti-racist" activists, then a wider target group including journalist Max Walsh, columnist Gerard Henderson and members of the NSW police Special Branch. The allegations were always strongly denied by Saleam – nevertheless, National Action members were convicted of numerous offences of harassment. This should have reached a peak when Saleam himself was jailed for inciting two young skinheads to shoot through the windows of the ANC representative in Australia, Eddie Funde, but Saleam's trial was eclipsed by the revelation that Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) listening devices at the National Action HQ had captured on tape the murder of a National Action leader, Wayne "Bovver" Smith, by another NA leader, Perry Whitehouse (*Sunday Herald Sun*, 30 June 1991).[3]

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[3] National Action skinhead Michael White, convicted for his role in the shotgun attack on the Funde home, reportedly had a lengthy criminal record by the age of 19, and had been expelled from Singapore at the age of 16 for drug offences. 'Court told of attack on ANC,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1989.

As for the Australian Nationalists' Movement, whose leader Peter "Jack" Van Tongeren was once NA's Perth organiser, most of its media coverage came only after its leading members were arrested and jailed for various crimes ranging from murder (of a fellow member mistakenly believed to be a police informer); false pretences; breaking, entering and stealing; arson; causing an explosion; wilful damage; assault and conspiracy (Greason 1993a).

Most Australian urban centres are at times host to Nazi skinhead outfits, but not all of these groupings or Nazi-identified individuals are necessarily linked formally to political organisations – some pick up their swastika paraphernalia from disposal stores, and limit their "political" activity to the purchase of CDs and tapes by racist British and American skinhead bands, which are available through a small number of record stores throughout the country. Accounts of such activities are found in articles such as 'Disaffected youths are ganging up on society' (*Sunday Age*, 21 June 1992) and 'The Right's Rough Edge' (*Sunday Age*, 24 October 1993).

Nevertheless, the tiny skinhead milieu means that racist skins are likely at some point to encounter formally organised racist groups in Australia or overseas. Two prominent neo-Nazi skinhead groups are the Melbourne-based Southern Cross Hammer Skinheads, which have extensive contacts with American and British neo-Nazi groups, and the Brisbane-based Australian National Socialist Movement (ANSM). The ANSM's propaganda is crude, largely based on overseas Nazi propaganda and is directed not only against "non whites" but also gay men and lesbians. In August 1993, a leader of the ANSM, Billy Smith, was sentenced to 200 hours of community service and full payment for repairs after pleading guilty to a graffiti attack on a Brisbane synagogue four months previously (*Australian Jewish News*, 13 August 1993).

Court records indicate that the neo-Nazi skinhead grouplets direct considerable effort into non-political criminal activity, such as drug trafficking and theft. "Political" activity for the most part involves physical attacks on opponents or opponents' property, combined with occasional racist graffiti or stickering/postering runs.

For example, in 1993, a household of Nazi skinheads in the Melbourne suburb of Northcote painted a number of racist slogans on buildings in that area, including "Jews are scum", "Arabs out", "Join the White Army, the Right Army", and "Six Million Jews was not enough". They were also involved with a gay bashing in the area. Three were charged with a number of graffiti and drug-related offences, and another was charged with assault.

A senior-sergeant from Northcote police noted: "Those involved in this group were not political, not organised in any real sense and not committed. Most of them probably wouldn't even know what fascism was all about" (*Northcote Leader*, 10 November 1993, p.1).

Even when articles on racist skinheads are not centred on court cases or police reports, the element of deviance is highlighted, sometimes on insufficient evidence.

The Sunday Age profiled so-called "anti-social and often violent" Melbourne youth gangs (22 June 1992). Most of the gangs referred to were based around ethnic groups (Lebanese Tigers, the predominantly Turkish Fordgate Wogs) or geographical locations (3174, the postcode for Noble Park; the North Street Juniors from Coburg and their rivals, the Juveniles Beyond Control from Hadfield), but the photograph accompanying the article showed two young men holding a Nazi battle flag and giving Hitler salutes. The photograph appeared to have been taken in a lounge room. Empty tequila and bourbon bottles sat on top of the TV set.

Neo-Nazis, we read, were "among the most anti-social of a social problem that has risen on the thorny back of youth unemployment" – the youth gang scene. The two men in the photograph, Nicky, 22, and Daryl, 21, sought to defend themselves against allegations that they were violent, without, however, giving away the thug mystique completely.

> *"People reckon we beat up old people and that sort of thing," Daryl says from the couch of a northern suburb's commission flat.*
>
> *"It's not true," he says. "Not if they're white. We get angry. Angry that the Government lets scum (Asian and Jewish migrants) into our country and doesn't give us jobs.*
>
> *"We're sick of what's going on in our country and we want to do something about it."* (*Sunday Age*, 21 June 1992, p.10)

What these young men actually did about their anger was not explained. There was nothing to show that they were members of any of the neo-Nazi groups then operating in Melbourne (National Action, White Australian Resistance, Southern Cross Hammer Skinheads, Australian National Socialist Movement). There was no evidence that their circle was any bigger than two. There was no evidence that they had ever beaten up anyone: old, young, Asian, Jewish. Posters in the background of the photograph were for rock musicians such as Alice Cooper, not Nazi groups.

Police, social workers and sociologists were interviewed in the article; none commented on the two men, or made any reference to alleged neo-Nazi gangs. No reference was made to the neo-Nazi groups then operating in Melbourne. No cases of actual violence by neo-Nazis were presented. All we were left with was the photograph: two young men, posing for the camera, trying to look as serious as anyone could while holding a disposal store screen-printed swastika flag. The headline above read: "Disaffected youths are ganging up on society" (*Sunday Age*, 21 June 1992, p.10).

Just over one year later, the same newspaper ran a full-page exposé on the local far-right, headed 'The Right's Rough Edge', written by one of the reporters who had compiled the earlier article (*Sunday Age*, 24 October 1993, p.11). "Here, as in Europe, the recession has created the right conditions for the spread of neo-Nazism," read the story's precede. The half-page photograph again featured two young neo-Nazis: this time it was Jarrod and David scowling at the camera, shirts off, just braces and tattoos in the backyard. David looked slightly underfed. Their story had a familiar ring to it.

> *Jarrod (24) and David (20) and those like them, are seen by most as anti-social, alienated, irrational and violent. They are the ugly face of Australia's so-called economic restructuring. Both have been unemployed for about a year.*
>
> *Jarrod and David deny they have initiated race-related fights, but admit to responding violently to taunts, particularly from Asians. They say they don't go looking for trouble, but trouble often finds them* (*Sunday Age*, 24 October 1993, p.11).

The usual rhetoric was mouthed – "Immigration should be stopped", "The whites are the supreme race. Everyone knows that", "Asians hate us as much as we hate them" – but the two men did not disclose what, if any, group they belonged to. No specific violent incidents involving the two men were identified.

It is perhaps peculiar that journalists who would not take on face value any political observation by young neo-Nazis such as Jarrod and David are willing to repeat without qualification their unverified boasts of violent activities. Then again, the very justification for interviewing these young men often rests on their real or imagined reputations for violence. Such an assumption is not entirely invalid, given the depressing rollcall of violence and criminality found in court reports of the kind already noted.

Yet the stories never seem to go further than voyeurism. In this, two parties can be satisfied: the journalist who needs to produce a new threat, however much it is factually lacking in specifics, and the neo-Nazi who thrives on projecting an image of menace and deviance. The real story, of why young people choose such a deliberately offensive lifestyle to express themselves, is ignored.

Doug Lorman

In search of order

Reporting car thefts in Western Australia

ON 6 April 1990 a stolen car involved in a high speed chase with police, collided with a Range Rover. Three young Aboriginal people were killed and the driver of the Range Rover, who was seriously injured, later died. The incident marked the beginning of a series of events in Western Australia surrounding young people, stolen cars and high speed car chases. The reaction from the media and the public surrounding these thefts culminated in the enactment of the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act* (WA) in February of 1992.

In Western Australia, motor vehicle crime and high speed chases had been a recurring issue long before the events of April 1990. Yet every now and again "a condition, episode, person, group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen 1972, p.9). As stated in earlier chapters of this book, Cohen described such a reaction as a "moral panic". The series of high speed chases in Western Australia from April 1990 to February 1992 evolved into just such a panic.

The development of the panic involves a number of key players, with the central player being the media. Intertwined with the media are the so-called agents of social control, or moral entrepreneurs, the most prominent of which are the police, the courts and the political representatives. This chapter traces the construction of a moral panic over the Perth car thefts and the role played by the media, the political sphere and the law enforcement agencies in this regard.

A primary role of the media is to provide sets of classifications that re-establish what is "normal" and representative of order. This re-establishment of order comes not only as a result of the work of journalists on their own but also in conjunction with law-makers and law enforcers, all of whom join as agents of social control. Further, this social control activity includes surveillance of deviant people and organisations, the identification of procedural stray, recommendations for controlling them and direct social control through the stigmatic effects of publicity (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1991, p.12).

This chapter concentrates on two major stages of the moral panic model. These are known as the inventory stage, where those exposed to the situation take stock of what has happened, and the reaction stage where those involved propose solutions to the situation. It is also during these stages that the agents of social control begin to play a dominant role in the process. This role and its connection with the media are also explored in this chapter.

The media

The media are central agents in moral panics and this partly stems from their role in society. This role can be divided into four major areas. First, the media informs the public about events of the day. Reporting deviance, especially criminal activities, takes up a major proportion of space in media reports. Second the media entertains. If content of a particular newspaper, radio or television station satisfies audience demands, then the potential advertising market expands. The corollary of audience maximisation is the third area in the role of the media, that is to make a profit. Television, radio or newspapers must sell advertising space otherwise they lose money. The pursuit of ratings or increased circulation becomes paramount and is a major influence in style formatting and content. The more listeners, viewers or readers the more chance advertisers will buy advertising space. This means the media organisation can charge higher advertising fees and increase its profitability. As such "the news media continue to market bad news because it entertains, is popular and maximises audiences" (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987, p.51).

Fourth, the media helps re-affirm dominant social norms and public morality. When values that are the subject of widespread public consensus are violated, "the news media enable members of the public to share their indignation, and provide an opportunity for the re-affirmation of the basic moral standards of society" (Grabosky & Wilson 1989, p.12). This re-affirmation involves the creation of the Other and by representing them as the antithesis of what is considered "normal", the media draw distinct moral boundaries. Not everyone though gets to participate in debates regarding the moral boundaries and where they should be drawn. The affirmation of morality is achieved through the "constant reference to the authorised knowers who are well placed in their respective organisations to offer the demarcations of symbolic boundaries" (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987, p.61).

Newsworthiness

The newsworthiness of a story depends on a number of multiple and intersecting factors. First is the notion of simplification. The event can be recognised as such and is unambiguous in meaning. There is the dramatic quality to the story. There is the notion of personalisation. That is portraying the events in terms of the key people involved. There is the underpinning theme to the story and its potential continuity. However, Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987, 1991) found that deviance and crime provide the main criteria for determining newsworthiness and that just under one-half of all news coverage in newspapers and popular television relates to crime, law, and justice. However, not all crime stories will make it into the news. Grabosky and Wilson (1989, pp.12–18) provide a number of criteria for a crime "story" to become an item of news.

The first criterion is whether there is a violent aspect in the story. Stories that tell of harm to "respectable" citizens, children and the elderly are more likely to receive coverage than incidents involving more marginal members of society such as the unemployed, young people and Aboriginals. Crime news is represented in terms of a morality play in which "editors seek out stories that will have 'impact on the community' or which tend to 'outrage' or 'threaten' society. In drawing such a bold line between Good and Evil, the Australian news media both reflect and reinforce the prejudices of Australians generally" (Grabosky & Wilson 1989, p.14). Themes of violence and the threat to society underpinned the moral panic over high speed car chases. This was embodied in headlines such as 'Threat to lives as youth gangs go on the rampage' (*West Australian*, 16 September 1991, p.3).

A second criterion for determining newsworthiness is the visual impact of the story. Violent acts (riots, terrorism and so on) provide good visual images and are more likely to get a run in preference to a story that has to rely on written content alone. While generally relating to television, the importance of visual images can be equally applied to newspapers. Indeed the visuals accompanying a newspaper story have more impact as they are permanent and can be viewed over and over again, constantly reinforcing the image created. Opposed to this is the transience of a television image which is only seen on the screen for a short time and can be easily forgotten. Combined with their accompanying headlines visuals help provide distinctive imagery in a story and enhance the dramatic impact, reinforcing the moral overtones inherent in the report. For example, the family portrait of a woman killed as a result of a high speed car chase (*West Australian*, 9 August 1991, p.3) with the accompanying text that informs us that there are now "two motherless children" as the result of the actions of "juvenile cowboys". These pictures and accompanying stories reinforce the harm that has befallen the "right sort of person".

Third, the timing of a story is a further criterion for newsworthiness. The coverage a story receives depends on what else is happening in the way of news. This particular criterion may be very relevant to the happenings in Western Australia. For example, according to Sercombe (1995) the real focus of the panic happened with the death of a pregnant mother and child on Christmas night 1991. This time of year is traditionally known as the "silly season" where little happens in the way of something newsworthy. As such the media were able to focus on the moral panic over high speed car chases.

Whatever the timing or other factors, in terms of local news, the deaths that occurred as a result of high speed chases were seen as important. What is just as important is how young people, and in particular Aboriginal young people were reported and how this style of reporting over high speed car chases lead to a moral panic.

The media and reporting of young people

Western Australia has one major newspaper, the *West Australian*. The paper "overwhelmingly casts youth in a law and order frame" (Sercombe 1995, p.4). His study of newspaper articles relating to youth between January 1990 and March 1992 found that 61% of articles were associated with crime. (See also chapter 5 in this book.) These findings support the Centre for Independent Journalism's (1992) research into the New South Wales media portrayal of young people which found that they "are mostly portrayed as an undifferentiated group characterised by strong criminal tendencies ..." (p.1). One particular media focus on young people was as a result of a spate of car thefts by groups of juveniles that often resulted in high speed chases. Between April 1990 and December 1991 five juveniles were killed in collisions involving stolen cars and other vehicles during the high speed chases. Total deaths of drivers and passengers was 17.

Many of the young people involved in the high speed chases were Aboriginal and so the moral panic carried a heavy racial undertone. There is a large degree of ambivalence when it comes to reporting Aboriginal young people. Stories regarding Aboriginal people often tend to be deemed less newsworthy (as are stories regarding most marginal groups in society). Such groups are invariably reported in negative terms. Moreover, Aboriginal young people are often the target of "law and order campaigns and media generated moral panics" (Cunneen & White 1995, p.128). Sercombe (1995) found that 85% of the newspaper articles in the *West Australian* between 1990 and 1992 that referred directly to Aboriginal young people were about crime.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found the media in Western Australia exhibited certain widespread practices in reporting Aboriginal issues. These included sensationalising crime and civil disturbances involving Aboriginal people; a failure to canvass Aboriginal opinion; a tendency to reproduce racial stereotypes; and a failure to provide readers with the historical and social background of Aboriginal people (Mickler 1992, p.4).

Source of news

News organisations rely on a number of information sources. However, while the potential array of sources is large, including official documents, academic texts, survey and trend statistics, and direct observation, "journalists tend to limit themselves to the 'performatives' of news releases and interview quotations from sources" (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989, p.1).

Sercombe's (1995) study of media representations of young people found that three sources dominated news articles about young people, the police, the courts and government ministers or spokespersons (p.182). This applied to representations of youth in general. However, in relation to Aboriginal young people, it was found that police were the dominant information source for articles (p.235). Police provide information in two ways: the official source, for example through a press release, or through direct police contact. Grabosky and Wilson (1989) argue that heavy reliance on the police as a source of information means "reporters are given only what the police want them to have" (p.29). As such, stories provided by police may contain a certain bias which may influence how a story is presented. As Sercombe (1995, p.238) noted: "generally, hard-line views communicated in the newspaper are those of its sources, rather than those of the newspaper itself".

High speed car chases

The moral panic over high speed car chases was not continuous but ebbed and flowed as interest waned and was regenerated by another fatal car chase. The media used a tentative "starting date" of 6 April 1990 for the high speed car chase moral panic, with many following reports referring back to this incident. Its culmination was the passing of the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act* (WA) in February 1992. A major catalyst for the expression of "public concern" over juvenile crime in Perth, was the "Rally for Justice" in August 1991. The rally was partly organised by radio personality Howard Sattler. It was "designed to pressure the government to introduce harsher penalties for juvenile offenders" (Mickler 1992, p.7). Given that the rally was organised by a radio personality, it became known as the Rally for Ratings. It is interesting to note that Sattler's ratings after the rally rose some 30% (Mickler 1992, p.7).

What accelerated events, however, was the death of a pregnant woman and her son on Christmas night 1991, as the result of a high speed chase between young people in a stolen vehicle and the police. From that point events moved with amazing rapidity so that on 5 February 1992 the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Act* was passed. In a climate of panic and great public expectation fuelled by the Rally for Justice, State Parliament was recalled early to debate and enact the legislation. Articles, editorials and/or letters to the editor appeared almost daily in the papers calling for the government to take action. Solutions were offered and events were analysed from every angle. The reactions by all concerned were indicative of the way a moral panic progresses.

The moral panic

The moral panic model was first used by Cohen (1972) to describe how seemingly innocuous events are "identified, symbolised, policed, dramatised and blown up into serious threats to life and limb (and) law and order" (Sumner 1994). The model constitutes a number of stages. The first is the warning stage which provides an indication of what is to come. The second is the impact stage, which is the actual events. Third is the inventory stage where people take stock of what is happening. This stage can be analysed within four interconnected processes. First there is the *labelling* process. The type of deviation is identified from which "further stereotyping, myth making and labelling" can proceed (Cohen 1972, p.44). This labelling process occurs as the moral panic gains momentum. As Sercombe noted, "political authorities worked hard to frame a discursive category that would capture this group of offenders, who could then be subject to special treatment" (1995, p.153). This category became the "repeat offender" a term that first appeared in the media in April 1991.

The second process is that of *prediction*, operating on the assumption that if it happened once it will happen again, especially if nothing is done to stop it. Thus, headlines such as 'Police warn of new threat' (*West Australian*, 14 June 1991, p.21) and, in response to calls for an end to high speed chases by the police, 'Chase ban(s) would cause chaos' (*West Australian*, 22 April 1991, p.5) provide a constant reminder of the potential for further disorder. As the focus of high speed chases crystallised after the December 1991 crash, predictions of further chaos continued until January 1992. This was evident in headlines such as: 'Tragedy catalyst for tough new line' (*West Australian*, 7 January 1992, p.3).

The third process of the inventory stage is that of *symbolisation*. During this process certain events and occurrences come to represent a wider problem (Cohen 1972, p.40). The process of symbolisation is essential in the search to re-establish a sense of order from the perceived disorder of the moral panic. The symbols that are constructed are then routinely referred to and deferred to – thus verifying a sense of order. Part of the symbolisation process is the identification of the Other, the antithesis of the "normal" and "rational" person. During the panic it was the Aboriginal young person who became symbolised as the Other. "They" became the sum total of all our own fears – the Other who enters our home, who steals the car. "He, or even she, is the one at whose hand nameless and irrational death may come, as the stolen car is driven irrationally, without regard for the rules" (Sercombe 1995, p.243). So when headlines such as 'Aborigines in half high speed chases' (*West Australian*, 18 May 1990, p.1) appear there is no doubt that Aboriginal young people are the Other, the folk-devil. There is also no doubt that the people concerned will continue that way, as the headline warned 'Youths: We'll keep on baiting police' (*West Australian*, 11 April 1990, p.7).

The fourth process of the inventory stage is that of *clearing of the situation*. This allows "full-scale demonology and hagiology to develop" (Cohen 1972, p.44). The folk-devil is identified and we know what they are capable of doing if the situation is allowed to continue. What remains is to do something about the situation; this is the reaction stage of the moral panic.

The reaction stage is divided into two interconnected parts. The first emphasises the opinions, attitude and themes that emerge. That is, the panic in question is analysed in the media from both the emotional and intellectual viewpoint, opinions are offered about the behaviour of those in question and the causes of that behaviour. News stories and letters to the editor provide no shortage of material about what happened and why. Breakdown of family tradition was blamed (*West Australian*, 23 May 1990). Courts were blamed for being too lenient. There was a link between the drug "speed" and thefts (see for example the *West Australian*, 27 December 1991, p.3; *West Australian*, 1 January 1992, p.1). The "system" in general was blamed. Very little was mentioned of the structural causes, although the editorial of 31 December 1991 did look at issues such as poverty, dispossession of land and alienation of

Aboriginal young people. However, even this article resorted to the traditional argument that "The breakdown of family life and self-esteem give them no respect for authority" (p.10), and that is why they commit such crimes.

The second part of the reaction stage emphasises the rescue phase during which people consider what should be done about the problem. This could also be described as the remedy phase. The reaction in Western Australia was almost predictable. Lengthy dialogue occurred in the news stories themselves, in editorials and in letters to the editor. Along with calls for longer prison sentences, there were calls to reintroduce conscription, send offenders to remote stations as punishment, to treat deaths arising from high speed chases as murder and a host of other "innovative" solutions. Inherent in this process is the legitimation of the social control agents' actions: "if one is dealing with a group which is vicious, destructive, causing the community a financial loss and repudiating its cherished values, then one is justified in responding punitively" (Cohen 1972, p.86). The police, courts and politicians made a major contribution to the dialogue on high speed car chases.

Social control culture

Previous sections of the chapter have looked at the role of the police in providing information for news reports. Further, the police used their access to the media to defend their position on high speed car chases. Despite reports that pursuing car thieves may actually be exacerbating the high speed chase problem and that nine out of ten cars stolen are recovered, the police still needed to justify their policy of pursuing car thieves in high speed chases. Consequently, the police union used the media to state that they lived in fear of their lives because of the high speed chases. Police Commissioner Brian Bull was constantly issuing press releases condemning lenient sentences and warning of the dangers of not continuing the practice of chasing car thieves. During the panic, police had the support of the media. The editorial in the *West Australian* of 9 April 1990 (p.10) gave tacit support to police actions while the page opposite had a "news extra" article that became a full-page justification of police actions.

There was a subnarrative during the moral panic over Perth high speed car chases including criticism of police practices by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, allegations of police brutality and a "series of submerged media events that threatened to expose police to public scrutiny" (Sheiner 1993, p.262). The police responses mentioned above may have been to deflect attention from any issues that could have arisen as a result of these subnarratives.

The WA Children's Court also came under criticism during the panic. In Cohen's (1972) study of mods and rockers the British courts supported the control agents through the use of increased and severe sentencing options as part of the strategy to deter further incidents. The courts also used options such as refusing bail in order to give young people a taste of imprisonment, supposedly to help in deterring young people from further offending. However, during the moral panic over high speed chases the WA courts were seen as part of the problem and sharing part of the blame for the prevalence of car theft and the resultant high speed chases. The Children's Court was harangued by organisers of the Rally for Justice, politicians, police and certain members of the public as being lenient in its sentencing. Judge Hal Jackson was president of the Children's Court at the time and was seen by these same people as personifying that leniency. He was criticised at the Rally for Justice because of his 18-month gaol sentence to a youth found guilty of manslaughter. He, and the juvenile justice system in general, were criticised by the media through their general reporting and editorials, State Government ministers, opposition politicians, police and the public through talkback radio and letters to the editor.

Politicians provided the third source of news information during the moral panic over high speed chases. Opposition parties were able to continually emphasise their commitment to a harder line on the treatment of young offenders. A corollary of this was that until the State Government decided to act in January 1992, the Opposition were able to control the debate on law and order, a factor that influenced the government's eventual actions to introduce the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act*.

The State Government, for its part, was at first willing to ride out the panic. Consultation with those involved in the youth sector was undertaken and advisory committees were established, all with the aim of looking at ways of addressing juvenile crime. However, by the time of the Christmas night accident the push for change became impossible to deflect and the *West Australian*'s headlines of 8 January reflected this shift when it carried the headline: 'People power won: Premier' (p.7). Indeed, rather than any real desire to institute appropriate ways to handle the problem, the move to introduce legislation was prompted by a government concern to reclaim the law and order debate, thereby gaining greater public legitimacy on this issue.

The legacy

In early February 1992 the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act* (WA) received parliamentary assent. This marks the culmination of the moral panic regarding high speed car chases. All moral panics bequeath a certain legacy. Some become institutionalised in the form of policies and laws. The institutional legacy of the moral panic over high speed car chases in Western Australia was this Act.

The Act, however, has created problems of its own. There is a concern among a growing number of people that the Act contravenes certain human rights conventions to which Australia is signatory. These incude the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Beijing Rules. Concern over the breach of international human rights obligations continues.

Another legacy of the moral panic was that the discourse surrounding young people changed. In 1991, as a result of the moral panic and its legacy we saw the construction of the "serious and repeat offender", that reinforces the identification of young Aboriginals as a law and order problem. This construction was as a result of a specific attempt to capture a certain target group in order to justify the debate on high speed car chases. By February 1992, wording of the legislation, now called the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act* (WA), and the terminology of "repeat offender" reflected the outcomes of debate and the target group the legislation was aimed at. "'Repeat Offender' is now an established part of the youth lexicon" (Sercombe 1995, p.153).

For both the State Government and the Opposition the moral panic was a chance to capture the law and order debate, a debate that had dominated the previous State election and was a prominent issue in other State elections during the early 1990s. For the police it was a chance to justify their actions and to divert attention away from the sub-narratives of police brutality and criticisms arising from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

The Act also had to be justified and seen to be effective. An article in March following the passing of the Act notes a substantial reduction in high speed chases. The assumption is that the law is working, yet closer examination shows that the number of car thefts was already on the way down before the law was enacted (*West Australian*, 13 March 1992, p.3).

However, the effectiveness of the legislation is less important than the symbolic victory in re-establishing social order through the "rule of law". Through increased intervention into the lives of the Other (that is Aboriginal young men and women), we are protected. The procedural stray has been identified, actions for controlling them have been recommended, and enacted, and as a result a sense of social control has been established. Also, by identifying the Other we have identified ourselves. We can live our lives "in the knowledge that we, at least, are rational lawful, peaceable, decent, hardworking, honest" (Sercombe 1995, p.244); unlike "them". The media, in their search for order have solidified our moral boundaries and denounced the Other. We can now sleep safe in our beds.

Soo-Lin Quek

The “imagined reality” of Vietnamese young people in the media

THE MEDIA, in all their forms, are a powerful site for representing and constructing imaginings of social phenomena. In this chapter, I focus on the print media, particularly in their construction of “ethnic youth gangs”. The two stories reporting on the same topic are chosen from two major Melbourne dailies: *The Age*, 7 February 1994 and the *Herald Sun*, 18 February 1994. The combined readership of these two dailies is significant, and the stories these newspapers tell help inform the world views of the people of Melbourne and the wider Australian community.

In *The Age* article, the headline, ‘Education the answer to gangs, say police’ directs the reader’s attention to gangs and youth crime in Melbourne. The article starts with the observation of a senior police representative identifying the problem of youth gangs. The generic term “youth gangs” used in the first three paragraphs of the article slips into “Vietnamese youth gangs” when Neil O’Loughlin, the Assistant Commissioner for Crime, says Vietnamese youth gangs were “a problem”. The subject of Vietnamese youth as gangs becomes the focus for the rest of the article. The assumption is that youth gangs are of Vietnamese origin and no mention is made of youth gangs that are of another cultural background. The key interviewee, Assistant Commissioner O’Loughlin, is reported as stating that Vietnamese young people group together because of “their common ethnicity” or “they can’t assimilate … with white Australia”. A 1992 internal Victoria Police Asian squad report is cited predicting that there will be a rise in crimes committed by Vietnamese gangs. To give legitimacy to this claim, the reporter citied an incident of “gang” violence where 50 “youths” attacked a group of teenagers. The ethnic composition of the “gang” is not stated except to say that Vietnamese young people were involved. The newspaper article concludes by quoting O’Loughlin: “…we are trying to educate the youth of today not to be antisocial, to have some form of law and order and respect authority in general and people’s property.” (*Age*, 17 February 1994).

The second article, (*Herald Sun*, 18 February 1994) highlights the same story with a large print headline stating: ‘Gangs a problem – police’. The content of the two stories is similar in that the key informant is Assistant Commissioner O’Loughlin. Vietnamese youth gangs are singled out in both stories as the problem. A report of Vietnamese youth violence was described, and the same finding from the Asian squad report was also cited. The only difference in the stories is that *The Age* article argues for a need to educate Vietnamese young people, while the *Herald Sun* invited comments from the President of the Vietnamese Community Association who reportedly sought a meeting with the Assistant Commissioner of Crime. Reportedly, the President of the Vietnamese Community Association explained that the majority of people within the Vietnamese community are integrating successfully into Australian society, although he claimed the Vietnamese community does have problems with some young people who break the law as do other groups within the broader community.

The dominant message about Vietnamese youth was that "they" were disproportionately represented in gang-related deviant action. "They" were spoken for by the police whose story was reported and given centre stage. The journalists in both articles gave primary space to Assistant Commissioner O'Loughlin, the voice of police authority and legitimate knowledge. Neil O'Loughlin spoke from two central positions of power, that of the Assistant Commissioner for Crime, and as an Occidental male expressing dominant discourses within Australia. He was the voice of legitimate power, shaping a construction of Vietnamese young people as the Other. His power derived from his status and was reinforced by having been given almost exclusive space to speak as the expert about Vietnamese youth and youth gangs.

The shaping of Vietnamese young people as the Other adds to the reinforcement of an "us" and "them" scenario. The "us" in the centre have the ability and power to mould narratives about Vietnamese young people, turning them into objects of scrutiny leaving little opportunity for "them" to voice their own stories and accounts of reality. Vietnamese young people were not given a voice to dialogue with others (the police, journalists, etc). Vietnamese young people are more than capable of representing themselves and articulating their realities. However, in neither story were young people given a voice. Choices about who is heard were determined by journalists, editors and others involved in the production of news.

A close reading of the two newspaper stories demonstrates how the choice of words and contexts shapes imaginings of Vietnamese young people as the Other. This imagining of the Other is coloured by historical constructions of the Oriental by the Occidental, infused with the contemporary re-interpretations of the Oriental (see Said 1995).

The popular usage of the term "youth gang" in its contemporary context implies a group of young people who engage in illegal activity, and so constitute a "problem" to be contained, controlled and eliminated. Moreover, the word "youth" essentially signifies "young men". In both newspaper stories there is a leap from incidents of violence to reports on the existence of "gangs" of Vietnamese young people. Vietnamese young people are tarred with the one and only brush. Based on assumptions of the Other as criminal and threat, a group of Vietnamese young people "hanging out" together in public, who may have no intentions of breaking the law, become suspect in the eyes of many, and are viewed with suspicion and an element of fear by the "ordinary law abiding" citizens.

Claims about the increase in "Vietnamese youth gang" violence (articulated by O'Loughlin) flies in the face of research carried out by Eastel (1994, p.91), who found that crime rates for "Vietnamese young people aged between 10 and 24 living in New South Wales were significantly lower than the crime rates of their non-Vietnamese counterparts. Approximately one-half the rate of proven offences for minors; one-half the general offence rate for 18- to 24-year-olds; one-fourth the non-Vietnamese drink-driving rate; and about one-tenth the level of drug offences. In fact, the only Vietnamese youth or minors rate that exceeded the non-Vietnamese was the female youth rate for larceny".

Neil O'Loughlin saw youth gangs as synonymous with young people spending time together. The fact that "they" are of the same language, the same culture, the same background and interest was apparently problematic. This generalisation developed further to the point where all groups of Vietnamese young people were identified as gangs. Reportedly, O'Loughlin argued that "they can't assimilate ... with white Australia". This is a telling statement that reflects his identification with "white Australia" and its central position. O'Loughlin's words also seem to signify a view that "white Australians" needed ethnic minority groups to "assimilate". "They" (Vietnamese young people), have to assimilate to "our" (white Australia) cultural and material world. In so doing, the Assistant Commissioner of Crime has established a binary opposition between us/them where white Australia becomes the leading positive term and the Vietnamese community is the contrasted derivative. Another binary opposition that can be read from the assimilation comment is that of lawful white Australians versus the unlawful ethnic minorities, or delinquent youth versus responsible citizen.

The construction of "Vietnamese youth gangs" in media reports such as those identified tells us more about the police and journalists than the Vietnamese young people because it defines the parameters of the police and journalist identities. By representing and defining imagined characteristics of the Other, such press reports create a distance between the object (that is Vietnamese youth gangs) and the subjects (police and journalists), and in doing so clearly define the boundaries and identity markers for the dominant group.

Scott (1990) wrote about the concept of difference and binary oppositions and how they communicate negative signifiers that contrast with positive signifiers. A system of hierarchy is established where the positive constructs the negative (p.137). In the press stories under examination, the superior leading term, "white Australia" constructs the negative "Vietnamese youth". The imagined reality, identity and fraternity of "white Australia" is further consolidated by Neil O'Loughlin; the ability to reproduce such knowledge relies on his power, prestige and reputation as an authoritative speaker.

Journalists and editors play a central role in constructing the way certain groups of young people are represented. They make decisions on what is reported, how it's reported and on the general content of the article. In both stories, O'Loughlin was selected to be the key informant. Journalists produce news and that is directed by the editorial policy of the papers. In turn editorial policies are informed by what is considered newsworthy and by what sells newspapers.

Neither of the newspaper stories allowed for the voices of Vietnamese young people. To allow "them" a voice would challenge popular stereotypes of Vietnamese young people. The nearest the *Herald Sun* came to eliciting comments from the Vietnamese community was to report on the views of Nguyen, the President of the Vietnamese Community Association. Although Nguyen is not a young person, he is positioned as speaker for and about "them". However, the space given to Nguyen compared to the space allotted to O'Loughlin was minimal. Under the weight of O'Loughlin's comments, Nguyen was forced to defend the Vietnamese community by stating that "they" are trying to integrate into Australian society.

The main actors in this detailed analysis are the journalists and authorative expert (the Assistant Commissioner for Crime, Neil O'Loughlin). Each reinforced the other's position by representing groups of Vietnamese young people as "gangs". The journalists and the crime expert demonstrated their power, prestige and authority by "othering" Vietnamese young people. In contrast, the Vietnamese young people themselves were left silent, unrepresented in these media reports about "them". The ability of Vietnamese young people to talk about who they are is eroded as they are regularly rendered voiceless in press reports about Asian gangs and the threat "they" represent to "Australian" culture and social order.

Ashley Carruthers

Suburbanasia!

Ways of reading cultural difference in the mainstream Australian media

THE STARTING point for this paper[1] is a divergence, a schism almost, in contemporary critical multicultural approaches to the Australian media. The source of this divergence is, put simply, a disagreement about just how multicultural the established media really are. Do NESB (non-English-speaking background) identities remain in the excluded margins of the symbolic nation imagined by the media or have they, to some extent, "come in from the cold"? At the risk of not doing justice to the complexity of the positions involved, I will identify two "sides" in this debate. The first is marked by the work of Tom O'Regan, and the second by that of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Racism and the Media Project. I will hold that we are, as O'Regan has suggested, to witness the "mainstreaming" of multiculturalism in Australia's mass culture.

In making this case I will refer to the specific example of representations of and participation by Vietnamese in the Australian media. I will be arguing that we are beginning to see a greater volume and variety of representations of Vietnamese, some of them "positive". Referring to the scholarly discourse on the Vietnamese community and the media, I will hold that the received assumption that there exist only negative media images of Vietnamese has had a blinkering effect. In the case of the film *Romper Stomper*, discussion of the film's deep preoccupation with ethnic difference was occluded by knee-jerk critical readings of its marginal and negative portrayal of Melbourne's Vietnamese community. (See also Karl Quinn on *Romper Stomper*, chapter 22).

I conclude by suggesting critical multiculturalism needs to move away from an understanding of the established Australian media as exclusivist and culturally absolutist. It would do better to focus on the ways in which existing unegalitarian intercommunal relations are reproduced under a cultural logic which positively values difference and tolerance (Hage 1994a).

Critical multicultural approaches to the media

Critical multiculturalism is a radical mode of critique of both the ideologies and social realities referred to (uncritically) as "multicultural" in the official discourses of those states which have adopted multiculturalism as a model for "managing" social diversity. It is not to be confused with the radical critique emanating from the far Right, which typically advocates turning back the clock to the days of "premulticultural" policy. On the contrary, critical multiculturalism is avowedly "promulticultural". It argues for an inclusive, egalitarian, polycentric politics of difference. It is the uncompromising commitment to this politics that sets critical multiculturalism at odds with its main "opponent" in the semiotic struggle over the term "multiculturalism", Eurocentric liberal pluralism.[2] This political ideological configuration has not, it argues, contrary to the self-congratulatory rhetoric of the creators and supporters of state multiculturalism (cf. for instance Grassby 1984), delivered intercommunal equality even in the politically "soft" realm of identity politics in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States (cf. Goldberg 1994).

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[1] This paper's catchy title is poached from a *Time Australia* report on Cabramatta ('Suburbanasia!', *Time Australia*, 8 April 1991, pp.18–26).

Critical multicultural approaches to the media in Australia have, in accord with this enterprise, taken on board the task of reading the media as a site for both the representation and reproduction of the persistent social disadvantage of NESB background and minority communities in Australia. Such readings have, for instance, identified a systematic stereotyping and under-representation of NESB identities in the media. They have also pointed to an under-supply of programs suited to the tastes of non-Anglo audiences (Coupe & Jakubowicz 1992; Jakubowicz 1994). One conclusion to be drawn from this is that potential NESB audiences for mainstream Australian television, finding themselves marginalised and represented in inaccurate, patronising and insulting ways, are effectively denied the important public service of "good television". This has been read as both an exclusion constituting a social disadvantage in itself, and a distinctly negative communication about the chances of NESB Australians gaining access to the nation's other cultural, social, economic and political institutions.

Schism

In his *Australian Television Culture*, O'Regan (1993) holds that we can identify a historical process of the "mainstreaming" of multiculturalism in the Australian media. For him a polyethnic reality is indeed beginning to appear on our TV screens. He finds the evidence of this development not only in the advent of SBS but also in the increasingly polyethnic character of the ABC and even the commercial networks (p.108). With this trend we are for O'Regan witnessing the decline of Anglocentrism in the media and the emergence of a symbolic landscape characterised by a more hybrid and open-ended figuration of national culture/identity. Multicultural media policy, since its introduction in the 1970s, has for O'Regan "held out the promise of two related kinds of cultural rights to full participation in social, economic and cultural life as Australian citizens" (p.107).

The UTS group, by contrast, has held strongly that Australian television's established services have been "more or less incapable of changing to allow a more multicultural service"

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[2] While the uncritical "multiculturalisms" of Eurocentric nations such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States have been the foci of insurgent multiculturalism to date, one could also identify a similarly "weak" official definition of multiculturalism in a country like Malaysia. Here is a self-avowedly multicultural nation in which Malay (rather than European) ethnicity occupies the central space of Same around which Others (Chinese, Indian) are layered in order of diminishing civic legitimacy. This poses the question of whether critical multiculturalism's exclusive preoccupation with Eurocentric states, and its rather exclusive definition of hierarchical multiculturalism as Eurocentric liberal pluralism, might be itself an affirmation, albeit a negative one, of this very Eurocentrism. Eurocentric states patently do not have a monopoly on the use of "weak" definitions of multiculturalism as a means of legitimating hierarchically layered diversity.

(Jakubowicz 1994, p.13). For these writers the unmarked term "Anglo" remains firmly at the hegemonic centre of the symbolic nation. Jakubowicz has argued that O'Regan, in positing Australian television as "a mosaic of sites" which "viewers move through easily ... adopting different identities as they travel ... dipping in and out of minoritarian and 'established' force-fields", fails to "come to grips with the exclusion and control of cultural differences which continue to characterise the 'established' Australian Media" (p.13). For the UTS group, even the multicultural project at SBS has not been so much about accommodating ethnic televisual aspirations as "about internationalising the Australian middle class" (p.13). This is to suggest that SBS satisfies mainly those viewers who are disposed towards the pleasurable consumption of "diversity", or what Ghassan Hage (1994a) calls the "multicultural sublime".

Vietnamese and the media

Representations of Vietnamese in the Australian media hold a particularly important place in this debate, one reflected in the amount of scholarly work that has been done on them. Vietnamese Australians have the undesirable distinction of being the "most hated" NESB community in Australia (Loo 1994a, p.74). They also hold the socioeconomic, if not the formal, status of second-class citizens (Coughlan 1994). In consequence, representations of Vietnamese Australians in the media act as something of an index of the progress, or lack of it, of the process of mainstreaming multiculturalism.

It is partly for these reasons that I have chosen to refer the "schism" identified in critical multiculturalism back to the specific example of Vietnamese and the media. There are other reasons also. As a Vietnamese speaker, and as someone who has worked as a volunteer English teacher in the Vietnamese community in Sydney[3] and has valued friends there, I take a personal interest in identifying and condemning forms of discrimination aimed at Vietnamese Australians. I do not presume to speak for Vietnamese in Australia – they can do that well enough for themselves – but rather to participate in the critique of a socio-cultural order in which I, as a citizen of multicultural Australia, am situated and in which I therefore have a stake.

Work on representations of Vietnamese in the mainstream Australian media has to date been informed primarily by the assumptions of the UTS position. Analysis has focused on the way in which Vietnamese identities, communal and individual, are marginalised and misrepresented. These negative readings have been underpinned by empirically researched claims about the structural and ideological limitations to the mainstreaming of multiculturalism, and in particular to the tardiness of the "coming into representation" of the Vietnamese community in Australia (cf. Jakubowicz 1994). While I acknowledge the reality of these constraints, I wish to take issue with the implication in recent studies that there exists an unchallenged hegemony of neoracist representations of Vietnamese in the Australian media. Contrary to this, I want to suggest that if we look for them with sufficiently open minds, "positive" representations of Vietnamese can be unearthed. For this position I find support in O'Regan's argument that critical multiculturalism:

> *will have to move from a criticism of the excluded margins which associates any presentation of ethnicity with offence to the group presented, tokenism and the "wog" the "Anglo" wants to see.* (1993, p.114).

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[3] This work was done with members of the Vietnamese Elderly Friendship Association of Cabramatta-Fairfield.

For me also this kind of oppositional blanket approach is not appropriate to understanding the symbolic products of media institutions that have "lived through" twenty years of state-sanctioned multicultural policy. As suggested above, this policy has itself provided some of the ideological and structural preconditions for the overcoming of limitations to the fairer representation and fuller participation of Vietnamese in the Australian media.

Vietnamese in the news: assassination, gangs and unruly ethnics

Representations of Vietnamese in the mainstream news have received some attention already (cf. Pittam & McKay 1991; McKay 1993; Loo 1994b; Jakubowicz 1994, pp.67–73). There is consensus here that while reporting on Vietnamese in Sydney is rarely overtly racist, the fact that the bulk of portrayals occur in the context of "bad news" creates a net image of Vietnamese as threat or danger. By and large I find it hard to dispute this. I would add that news is, by definition, bad news, and thus we should expect to see the negative side of things in news reports. Certainly crime and drugs are present in the Vietnamese community, and we should expect to see them reported on – but not sensationally, or at least not any more sensationally than "non-ethnic" crime. Here I want to argue that representations of Vietnamese in the news evidence both the persistent fragility of the status of the Vietnamese community in Australia, and at the same time its growing participation in the mainstream. This purchase on the mainstream is evidenced in the self-representations and anti-racist critiques which have appeared alongside negative media images.

A recent event which occasioned a flurry of media attention to the Vietnamese community in Sydney was the shooting of the Labor member for Cabramatta, John Newman. In an emotional climate of fear and excitement the finger was pointed, in the complete absence of evidence, at Vietnamese businessman and politician Phuong Ngo, other "rowdy" ethnic minorities such as the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, and by implication at the Vietnamese community as a whole. The overwhelming image in the weeks following John Newman's death was of "streets of fear" plagued by ultra-violent Vietnamese youth gangs, extortionists and ruthless heroin pushers. This mythologised Cabramatta is one that the great majority of the residents of the real Cabramatta would not recognise. It little resembles the experience of everyday life in the community familiar to the majority of very ordinary families who make it up, and doesn't offer to outsiders any hint of the great number of very positive, hopeful and meaningful lives being lived in this suburb despite the difficult conditions of high rates of unemployment and crime (cf. Loo 1994b). This orientalisation[4] did not go unanalysed or unanswered by the Vietnamese community, which mounted at least one self-representation in the mainstream press to counter it. Nguyen Hong Anh, editor of the popular *TiVi Tuan-san*, a national Vietnamese language TV and news weekly, said in *The Sunday Age*:

> *Criminal activity that originates in the Vietnamese community must be stopped and punished. It is very important, though, that a clear distinction be made between criminal elements and the majority, who are law-abiding citizens, within the Vietnamese community. Like most other Australians, we wish to have a peaceful and harmonious life, raise and educate our children and participate in democratic processes* (Nguyen Hong Anh, 'A Race is Not Guilty', *Sunday Age*, 11 September 1994, p.3).

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[4] Coined by Said, this term has been generalised to refer to the way in which disenfranchised groups, deprived of the means to mount representations of themselves, are constructed in disempowering ways in the discourses of dominant groups.

The edition of 14 September 1994 of *TiVi Tuan-san* carries the headline: 'The unknown killer of John Newman: the Australian press points the finger at the Vietnamese race', and includes a translation of Nguyen Hong Anh's article. These statements in self-defence reflect how keenly Vietnamese in Australia feel the barbs of media opinion. For an exile community which has struggled in the past with justifying its presence in Australia, and still feels the need to do so, unfair media treatment is an uncalled for blow to morale. Of significance here was the capacity of the Vietnamese community to respond, even in a small way, to its generally negative media coverage through some of these same media. Its orientalisation was challenged also by non-Vietnamese journalists such as Greg Sheridan, writing from the orthodox "official" multicultural platform of "a fair go for all Australians" ('Media Hysteria Distorts Facts on Asian Crime', *Australian*) 14 September 1994, p.15). Notably, story lines which challenged stereotypical representations and anti-Vietnamese prejudice outnumbered those reinforcing them in *The Australian*'s reporting of Newman's murder (Loo 1994b, p.75). In his otherwise admirable paper, Loo fails to consider the implications of the presence of this pro-Vietnamese reporting, brushing it aside in his hurry to get to the bad news.

O'Regan argues for an extension into television and other media of existing multicultural policy emphases promoting anti-racism, the mainstreaming of equal opportunity, affirmative action, improved life chances and economic and social integration (1993, p.109). These policy initiatives and their accompanying sentiments served during the John Newman episode as a platform for Vietnamese and pro-Vietnamese voices, like Nguyen's and Sheridan's, to challenge media beat-ups of Cabramatta.

I would, then, warn readers against the tendency of critical multiculturalism of the UTS stamp to underrate the increasing (and increasingly diverse) representation of NESB communities in the Australian media, and the improved chances available to their members to participate as cultural producers in these media. As Stam & Shohat point out, today's increasingly multicentric media are always potentially endowed with the power to offer countervailing representations of marginalised communities (p.301). I would also take issue [as I have done at greater length elsewhere (Carruthers 1995)] with the tendency of the UTS approach to overrate the effects of the "politics of recognition" on Vietnamese Australians' identities, self-esteem, and subjective estimations of life-chances. The politics of recognition thesis holds, in essence, that "the projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalised" (Taylor 1992, p.81). While, of course, I don't reject this thesis, indebted as it is to Said's work on orientalism, I would argue that the UTS approach overemphasises the importance of the host culture as a "significant other" whose approval and recognition NESB Australians crave. While the rather "hurt" nature of the Vietnamese response to the reporting of John Newman's death shows that Vietnamese Australians are not immune to the politics of recognition, the very fact that it was so forthrightly mounted affirms the power of their intracommunal sources of identity and self esteem. The ability to recognise the falsity and distortion of this "recognition" cannot but be premised on an alternative, positive, *self recognition*. Whether or not this "symbolic capital" can successfully be converted into political agency remains to be seen [Perera & Pugliese (1994) offer a rather gloomy prognosis on this]. The willingness and confidence of a disadvantaged ethnic community to claim and defend its ground in the politics of identity would, however, seem to be the essential first step towards winning a stake in politics proper, and of advancing towards equality under Australian capitalism. We should be more open than the UTS position allows to the possibility that the media will play a positive, or at least contradictory role in this process.

Romper Stomper

One recent instance of the dramatic representation of Vietnamese in Australia was in Geoffrey Wright's 1993 film, *Romper Stomper*. Most critical writing on the film has pinpointed its problematic treatment of Melbourne Vietnamese. It has been argued that they are present in the film merely as a plot contrivance, as a foil for the gang of neo-Nazi skinheads which forms, perversely, the centre of identification for viewers. For Asian-Australian filmmaker, Teck Tan, "the Asian characters in there were nothing more than cardboard cutouts. They were there to get bashed up and to bash back. There was no balance in the sense of an Asian counter-hero" (in Berry 1993, p.44). Christos Tsiolkas (1993, p.47) compares *Stomper* to *Spotswood*, an Australian film which:

> *takes place in a western suburbs textile factory and ALL the characters are Anglo-Celtic. For the 'ethnic' viewer the film is like a slap in the face. You realise that for Australian cinema the 'wogs' really do not exist.* Stomper *cannot really exclude the irritant of ethnicity as it supplies the motivation for its characters' actions, but it does work to suppress and disempower the possibility of 'wogs' or 'gooks' being legitimate characters on screen.*

This seems to be a paradigm case of the UTS scenario, in which NESB identities remain on the margins of mainstream representation, appearing only in the role of the "Them" against which the "Us" of Anglo identity is constituted. But let's resist for a moment the temptation to make this reading, one for which *Stomper* is certainly an easy target. By making normative assumptions about what would constitute the inclusion of polyethnicity in the narrative (e.g., the presence of an Asian counter-hero), might this orthodox reading not be obscuring the less patent ways in which polyethnicity is treated in the film? I would argue that far from being peripheral, ethnic difference is in fact central to *Stomper*: the neo-Nazi gang whose exploits the film chronicles is obsessively concerned with its own and others' ethnicities. This is in large part because it is undergoing the "Anglo identity crisis"; we are witnessing a dramatic portrayal of the *ethnicisation* of a previously ethnically unmarked group in the social climate created in 1990s Melbourne by immigration and multicultural policy since the early 1970s. This context is critical to the group's coming to a paranoid perception of itself as an alienated minority in its "own" land. Indeed, the very formation of the group is a response to its members' perceived threat that their white Australian identities will be swamped by the penetration of racial Others into their "proper" territory, the working-class suburbs of Melbourne. Here the film excels in representing the group's distorted, bounded knowledgeability about its society and its position in that society – its insiders and outsiders, its tradition and birthright.[5] Of significance here is the extreme marginalism of the racist group. Their reactionary identification with the absolute racism of the White Australia policy puts them, in the film's narrative, very much on the fringes of contemporary multicultural society.

By approaching the film via the orthodox mode of "Vietnamese and the media" analysis, critical multicultural work missed the film's concern with polityethnicity entirely. What resulted were *monocultural* analyses of a film that dealt interestingly with a marginal counter culture based around bottom-up resistance, in the form of ethnic absolutism, to the tolerant and pluralist values of official multicultural ideology. How much more "multicultural" a theme could a critic wish for? Unfortunately the lashing the film received from both critical multiculturalist and more conservative writers would seem to discourage others from attempting to deal with ethnicity, an effect other than what these writers might have desired.

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[5] David Greason, author of *I Was A Teenage Fascist* (1994), testifies to the accuracy of the portrayal of the gang: 'Wright has captured this world very well: the basic cowardice, the grandiose half-baked theories, and the shabby bedroom walls covered with maps and car photos. Russel Crowe as Hando is the most believable psychotic skinhead alive' (1993b). (See also Greason in this book, chapter 17).

The risks of diversity

Those who seek to make a cultural exclusionist/absolutist argument about mass culture in Australia are, I would argue, swimming against the current. This is simply not compatible with the political and symbolic climate produced by a mode of governmentality whereby "ethnic minority cultures are ... welcomed and celebrated as enriching Australian national culture rather than threatening it" (Stratton & Ang 1994, p.150). Having suggested that a "diverse" media might play a positive role in the furthering of at least the identity politics of NESB communities, I want now to briefly consider how the diversity I have identified might have negative consequences. The problem most needing to be addressed in the contemporary multicultural scene seems in this light to be that of how non-egalitarian intercommunal relations might be reproduced in a time and place where the postmodernist ethos of "liberty, diversity and tolerance" prevails. Here Bauman, speaking of Western liberal pluralism, maintains:

> *The age of cultural hegemony seems to have passed: cultures are meant to be enjoyed, not fought for. In our type of society, economic and political domination may well do without hegemony; it found the way of reproducing itself under conditions of cultural variety* (Bauman 1991, p.274).

Markets are not racist.[6] We can trust the commercial culture industries to incorporate non-Anglo subject positions into their products because this is the best means of securing the loyalty of non-Anglo audiences, who are, of course, potential consumers. It is in these industries' interests to win viewers away from markets built on ethnic community-defined consumer identities, which are difficult for them to penetrate, and towards those from which they derive profits. Commercial culture stands to gain by winning second generation Vietnamese Australians, for instance, away from the Vietnamese-language symbolic goods available in alternative, community-specific markets.[7] This will not be achieved by offending Vietnamese consumers, or by demanding that they give up entirely their ethnic identities as a condition of becoming "mainstream" audiences. Witness the attempts of the producers of *Heartbreak High* to enlist youth NESB audiences via identification with the radically multicultural milieu of the fictive school's students. The character at the centre of the program is not of Anglo but of Greek descent, and one of the regular characters is in fact Vietnamese. Despite their ethnically diverse backgrounds, the students are united by their avid consumption of the symbolic goods (mostly fashion and music) provided not by their respective ethnic communities but by the host culture. The difference and individuality of their personal styles is meaningful by reference to the "allowable improvisations" of global youth culture, rather than those codes local to NESB communities.[8]

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[6] I owe this observation to Balihar Sanghera, who pointed it out to me in conversation.

[7] The symbolic goods found in Vietnamese video and music shops in Bankstown and Cabramatta are not produced in Australia (although they are often pirated here), but are imported from the American and French diasporic communities, from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and from Vietnam. These symbolic and economic flows cut out the host culture completely, the profits stopping with their offshore makers and local piraters.

The type of diversity promoted by *Heartbreak High* thus entails the gradual replacement of communally managed identities with market-dependent, individually chosen lifestyles. This marketed diversity has the effect, Bauman has argued, of breaking down the real diversity of alternative, communally chosen forms of life in favour of the inexhaustible difference of the "cornucopia of merchandised identities" (Bauman 1991, p.273). These market-dependent identities are not incompatible with diverse ethnic identities, since they don't demand conformity to any one culture or posit the superiority of any one ethnicity. What they do instead is dis-embed ethnic identity from communal practices and shared cultural values and re-fashion it into a matter of reflexive, individual choice – necessarily harmful effects on communal integrity following.[9]

Conclusion

My criticism of O'Regan would, then, differ from that of the UTS group, i.e., that he posits a false plurality of cultural differences where what in fact exists is a dominant Anglo cultural identity which excludes and controls all the others. For me, he correctly identifies a cultural and ethnic diversification of mass culture, but errs in failing to investigate its possibly negative consequences.

Here "positive" representations might in the end prove more effective than the media invisibility of NESB groups, or their blatantly distorted recognition, in furthering something like the "assimilation" that is so constant a referent for the UTS group.

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[8] In the streets of Cabramatta and Bankstown the difference is immediately discernible between young Vietnamese people who do their shopping at stores like Portman's, Sportsgirl and Jeans West, and those who shop at local clothing stores whose fashions are defined by the more formal and modest norms set by the Vietnamese community.

[9] I will have to defer to another paper discussion of a redemptive possibility that presents itself here. This possibility is that of "partial disembedding", i.e., the possibility of finding somewhere between communally managed identities, which for young Vietnamese can be particularly stifling, and merchandised ones, which are chronically unstable and ambivalent. Cf. Carruthers (1995) for some ethnographic work that starts to head in this direction.

Rob Watts

"Revolting, lewd, disgusting and indecent"

Australian press representations of student protesters, 1965–1969

AUSTRALIA WAS involved in the war in Vietnam between May 1965 and December 1971. Four hundred and ninety-six Australian military personnel were killed or died in Vietnam (Murphy 1992, p.316). The survivors came home to a subdued and uneasy welcome (Maddock 1989, p.146). The longest war in which Australians have fought, it was also the one which enjoyed the least popular support. By August 1969, opinion polls were indicating significant opposition to the war (Goot & Tiffen 1981, p.135). Faced with a level of opposition unparalleled since the anti-conscription campaigns of 1916 and 1917, official opinion set out to discredit the opposition (Langley 1992). Young people became key actors in the anti-war protest movement. In the first years of the Vietnam war the Australian press presented a uniformly hostile portrait of that protest. They did this by drawing on arguments and metaphors developed in the first decades after 1945, a period of Cold War, when global politics became a contest between the USA and the USSR in a struggle of mythic proportions between Democracy and Communism (Curthoys & Merritt 1984). As in so many other instances in the media's treatment of young people analysed in this book, the lines between myth and reality frequently blurred. Yet why should we revisit the history of Australia's press treatment of young anti-war protestors?

Partly we should do so because hostility to the anti-war movement has been expressed recently which implicates the role of the press. There are historical revisionists who have disparaged the anti-war movement as "derivative", suggesting that the Australian anti-war movement was influenced by "overseas agitators". This is exemplified in Bolton's (1990) claim that:

> *Perhaps inevitably the forms of protest followed American models as faithfully as the Australian government followed American policy* (p.168).

Yet how does Bolton know this? As an empiricist historian, Bolton has read the documents from the period. In particular he has drawn on contemporary newspaper reports.

On the other hand there is the hostility of postmodernists like Gerster and Bassett (1993, p.38), who argue that the "student sixties" is just a "cultural myth" the product of nostalgia and a media "which packages history for mass consumption". In an approach typical of postmodernists, Gerster and Bassett deny that issues of truth or power matter; for them, press reports of the 1960s are just an interesting example of the media manufacturing playful illusions. But was the Australian media representation of protest simply an instance of "myth-making" and illusion? This chapter argues that the media, in the early years of the Vietnam war, were part of a wider process of political mobilisation designed to question the value of criticism of Australia's Vietnam policy. It also suggests that uncritical reliance by empiricists or postmodernists alike on press reports for evidence is a dangerous practice.

This chapter focuses on print media representations of the student protest movement between 1965 and 1969. It has taken a sample of capital city daily newspapers as its data as well as several high circulation weekly magazines.[1] (I do not address the question of how the entire spectrum of anti-war protest was represented, nor how, or why press representations began to change after 1969–70). I begin by reviewing one exemplary postmodernist interpretation of the student protest movement by Gerster and Bassett (1993) which insists there is no issue of truth or political power involved in the way the press fashioned the news of anti-war protest. Yet the press treatment of student protesters during 1965–1969 was consistently political. The Australian press had to come to terms with an unprecedented degree of "mass" political mobilisation by young people. In this exercise the bulk of the press drew on either or both of two discourses. One was shaped by the Cold War that defined the student movement as distinctly "un-Australian", "derivative", populated by agents of "international" subversion. The other treatment drew on a discourse about adolescents as "irresponsible youth". The use of press reports from the 1960s as evidence for this or that view of student protest needs to be carried out with a good deal of critical sensitivity to the discursive nature of these news reports.

Postmodernism on the myths of the "student sixties"

In the late 1970s the field of media studies was controversial. On the one hand there were those liberal researchers who saw in the media a neutral communications system and who used empiricist methodology to establish "the effects of the media" on its audience (Singer 1980; Dusseyer 1979). On the other hand there were Marxist and feminist theorists equally insistent that the media constituted an industry involved in justifying and reproducing class or gender oppression (Bennett 1977; Hall et al. 1978). Since then the field of media studies has been increasingly redefined as a form of "cultural studies" shaped ostensibly by postmodernism (Garnham 1990, pp.1–5). Before I look at Gerster and Bassett's revealing instance of the way postmodernists use the media for their research, I briefly outline the character of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is also known as post-structuralism or post-empiricism.[2] In a general sense postmodernists have made many useful theoretical contributions. Yet there is also both a frivolous and anti-political cast in much postmodernist work. As I suggest shortly, Gerster and Bassett exemplify a postmodernist inclination to ignore the issue of power. Post-modernism is not easily grasped (Frow 1989; Bauman 1992). The term refers to a collective insistence on the socially and linguistically constructed nature of knowledge. Postmodernists have rightly criticised the adherence of twentieth century empiricists and positivists to what Halliday calls the "commonsense conception of language" (Halliday 1978). (This refers to the making of a distinction between "reality" and something that is simply linguistic and/or the stuff of "knowledge"). The "commonsense account of language" suggests the function of language is simply to act as a conduit for labelling or knowing what is real. Such an account then claims that "truth" lies in the proper *correspondence* of "things" with "language".

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[1] The sample included the Melbourne *Age*, the *Sun News Pictorial*, the Hobart *Mercury*, and the two magazines the *Bulletin* and *TIME*. The focus on Melbourne newspapers reflected the judgment that the anti-war movement was strong even as it refelected the pragmatics of accessing a reasonable slice of the newspapers. It was decided not to examine the new (at the time) national daily, *The Australian*, even though this paper established a strong anti-war focus from its inception in 1965.

[2] In the following remarks I do not suggest that in every respect Gerster and Basett's is a postmodernist treatment. Equally, I do not say that in any significant way any, or all, postmodernists would endorse the substantive claims and methods of Gerster and Bassett.

There is an ambiguous value in the postmodernist claim that all knowledge is indeterminant and artefactual because knowledge is a discursive practice. For all of the corrective value of the postmodernist critique the question of power remains a problem. A useful point is made by some postmodernists that *the meaning of power lies in the power to mean*. Some postmodernists accept that neither truth nor justice are anything more than illusions or a play on words. If any particular sign never means anything essentially, then it is possible for some postmodernists to claim that "meaning" is an arbitrary matter possessing little, if any, ethical or truth value (Eagleton 1983, pp.120–132). In consequence, too many postmodernists (including Gerster and Bassett), ignore the issue of power.

For others, however, the claim that any particular sign can never mean essentially anything entails that "meaning" becomes an eminently political and contestable matter. This will be especially so given a social context of unequal social relationships between, say, men and women, adults and children or whites and blacks. Given such oppositional and unequal relationships, individuals speak to each other using structured discourses; those discourses are best understood as *social practices which constitute and help to organise the unequal social relations through the use of constitutive linguistic categories*. In a social world where people have unequal power our linguistic practices can point to or hide the context of social inequality and unequal social relations.

In this way the exercise of power and the forms of resistance to that power "lie" at the heart of discourse. People who have power have it in part because of their capacity to make *their* definitions and *their* understandings more authoritative than anyone else's. Politics and history are about power struggles between "winners" and "losers" in the struggle over meaning.

But, of course, these discursive battles are not fought out on a level playing field. Those who have power do so because they occupy particular strategic positions on that playing field which, following Habermas (1979), we can can loosely refer to as the "public sphere". At the centre of the modern public sphere are the networks of actors, organisations and technologies of representation we call the "mass media". How well do postmodernists approach the issues of power and the media?

Gerster and Bassett's (1993) treatment is an historiographical version of postmodernism and offers a useful insight both into certain general tendencies and, in this case, how they uncritically use "evidence" from contemporary newspapers to make their case. Gerster and Bassett begin with a typical postmodernist claim that everything is myth when they suggest that:

> *... most discussions of the 1960s, whatever their earnest historiographical intentions are contrived exercises in myth-making* (p.3).

They claim the "student sixties" is just a "cultural myth propagated by terminally nostalgic veteran protestors and by a media which packages history for mass consumption" (p.38). This is the prelude to their claim that:

> *… the sixties are so entrenched as a cultural commodity and so established by the processes of memory as a fictional construct that they are as relentlessly elusive as the Trojan wars. The decade has been plundered relentlessly for its mythopoeiac associations, peddled as a sort of tonic for wilting flower-children suffering post-sixties neurosis* (p.38).

How do they know this? After sensibly observing that the student protest movement did not spring out of nowhere in 1965, Gerster and Bassett set out to "prove" the essentially derivative character of Australian protest:

> *… the sixties' protest culture can be seen to have emerged directly from the Beatnik sub-cultures of the late 1950s, such as that encountered by Duggan, the half-breed delinquent in Colin Johnsons,* Wild Cat Falling *(1965) … except for their lack of an overt political commitment (a not insignificant difference), the Beats practised the alternative lifestyles celebrated in the late 1960s, exploring avenues of sexual and pharmaceutical gratification, Eastern mysticism and visionary nihilism in a restless quest for self realisation* (pp.40–1).

Gerster and Bassett have collapsed the diverse anti-war/anti-conscription movements into the "counter culture". This is designed to demonstrate that the anti-war social movement was self-indulgent, unserious and/or derivative.

What evidence do they have for this? Gerster and Bassett draw heavily on the journalism of the sixties and seventies. In their discussion of Vietnam there are 215 references. Over half of these are news reports. Another one in seven are references to novels, poems and plays. There are surprisingly few references to scholarly works, perhaps no more than 42, few of which draw on any oral history. The sum effect is less than compelling. For example, having re-affirmed the "derivative status of the anti-war movement" they reach for Glenda Adams' novel, *Dancing on Coral* (Gerster & Basset 1993 p.67). This mode of evidencing claims is well illustrated in the use of press photographs. Discussing an image of a United States tank dragging a dead Viet Cong behind it they suggest first that the image signifies the anti-war movement's view of the United States as brutal, callous, etc. Further, it signifies the way America "dragged" Australia into the war. Finally, it signifies the way the the United States anti-war movement dragged the Australian anti-war movement into protest. And so:

> *Without an indigenous revolutionary tradition, they [the Australian anti-war movement] failed to develop styles of protest appropriate to local social conditions, following the lead of foreign, in particular, American models* (p.66).

The best of the diplomatic histories suggest that far from being "dragged" into the Vietnam conflict, Australian politicians, military advisers and civil servants actively pursued the Americans for an invitation to the war out of consideration of what they felt were pressing *Australian* strategic and diplomatic imperatives (Sexton 1981; Pemberton 1987; Edwards 1992). By the 1960s there was a long and robust tradition of civil disobedience and political action in Australia. Some of this was located in the union movement, some of it in the durable traditions of the radical, peace and anti-conscription movements. Some older leaders of the sixties movement had fought in the anti-conscription campaigns of 1916–17, A.A. Calwell, the Labor Opposition leader, could draw on a long tradition of protest. It is inaccurate of Gerster and Bassett to suggest that the local anti-war movement was derivative and sprang into existence on the cue of foreign examples. Equally, it is fair to suggest that a "youth movement" like the student anti-war movement was a relative novelty in an Australian context, where university students had traditionally been conservative.

How then should we regard the role of the media in the "public sphere", and, in particular, how should we regard the press treatment of the student protest movement during the first few years of the Vietnam war?

The press

The work of the print media is shaped both actually and discursively by the pre-eminent fact that this work takes place in capitalist business organisations. The work organisation, internal hierarchy of decision-making and raison d'etre of modern media organisations in the private sector are shaped by the logic and political relations of capitalist accumulation. This does not mean that all the news reflects the values or interests of the business sector. It undoubtedly shapes the reporting of those elements of the news that are direct representations of capitalist interests (involving union activities, industrial conflict or the strategic importance of the profit motive, economic news, the value base of business, or the problems of excessive government regulation). However, on a large range of news issues, the representation of issues and images and their semiotic significance is much less "determined" by the capitalist provenance of the news organisation.

The actual structuring and production of news is governed by many other logics of action such as 1) the deployment of certain genres of news (like human interest stories or "bad news is good news"), 2) media support for an ideological mobilisation sponsored by state or community agencies, for example, around an anti-smoking campaign or a patriotic rallying of citizen support for a newly declared war) or 3) the consequences of engaging in market competition for a larger share of audience. How then did the print media represent the student protest movement of the 1960s?

The Australian print media's representation of the anti-war protest movement through the 1960s was implicated in an older mobilisation process that had become part of the normal process of mobilising support for the democracies engaged in the Cold War since 1954.

This mobilisation drew on a range of well-entrenched patriotic organisations and discourses especially those which defined a common enemy like International Communism.

Apart from anecdotal hints from politicians of the time (Howson 1987), there is no archival evidence to demonstrate that newspaper owners and editors were invited by governments as they had been in 1914 and again in 1939, to set up patriotic frameworks of self-censorship, especially on the matter of domestic dissent. Perhaps in 1964–66 there was no need: after all Australia had been in a state of ideological mobilisation against International Communism since the late 1940s and Australia's main newspapers had long been in the forefront of that mobilisation.

In reporting on student protestors, the Australian press in the 1960s drew on two durable genres when constructing the news of protest and dissent. Well before the onset of the student protest movement one reporter previewed the choices open to the press after 1965 in terms of how to represent them. Young people could:

> *... belong to bodgie-type mobs ready to snake-dance on the slightest provocation – the kind of vandal well known in Sydney and Melbourne who hack up Captain Cook's cottage, rip up bus seats, mire churches and schools and ruin life-saving equipment in a sort of psychopathic or sadistic fury. [Or they are susceptible to] long-haired professors in teeming universities who ... are*

> *always on the side of the exotic enemy, and talking of the need for "peace", [and] always the backers or tolerators of Communist activities* (*Bulletin*, 30 June 1960).

Both representations had a distinctively "political" character. Making the point that protest was "derivative" of overseas experience enabled critics to open up talk about "international subversion". The press could also deploy the other discursive frame that insisted on the self-indulgent and irresponsible basis of any protest involving young people. This drew on an older social science discourse about "adolescence" and the "youth culture" model developed by American sociologists after Parsons (1942). This saw "youth culture" as an "irresponsible" age-based and homogenous culture. In either case the effect was to deny serious moral or political significance to the young protestors a point that doubtless comforted right-wing ideologues of the time (Henderson 1969).

Student movement as derivative and international

As in any other aspect of news reportage, the production of images and ideas about student demonstrations was worked into the formulae of appropriate news genres (Miller 1976). These were typically of the civil war/natural disaster kind that drew heavily on the simplifying architecture of Cold War discourse.

The dominant tendency in media reports of the student movement in the post-1965 years after Australia committed troops to Vietnam was generally hostile. These news reports drew on images and metaphors from the Cold War discourse with its division of the world into two opposed camps, engaged in a Titanic struggle for control over the fate of the World. The *Bulletin*'s warning in 1960 that the "Mao Plan of 1953" envisaged "the defensive and offensive preparations of the Soviet Union and China [being] completed before 1960", was typical of this Cold War mythos (*Bulletin*, 30 June 1960). Failure to support the cause of America and the Democracies was logically and politically equivalent to supporting International Communism.

There had long been concern about the effects of communism on the culture of Australia's universities. Concern about "communist influence" in the universities, built on one of the staples of press reports about "Red" influence in the unions, the Labor Party, and the peace movement through the 1950s. Since the Menzies government's attempt in 1950–51 to legally outlaw membership in the Communist Party of Australia the press had held that communists were conspirators pledged to undermine the universities, to "fake research, indoctrinate students, smear and intimidate their enemies", to use their influence to get "fellow travellers" into university positions and even to "pass secrets on to a foreign power ..." It was axiomatic that anyone who was a member of the Communist Party "must be unfit for an academic job" (*Bulletin*, 15 March 1961). Cold warrior Frank Knopfelmacher's account of alleged communist activities within the University of Melbourne (including claims that phone lines were tampered with and that "secret cellars" were being dug to hide "Reds"), attracted national attention (*Bulletin*, 12 April 1961) – and a subsequent spate of lawsuits.

In 1968, opposition to the war became a serious matter. From early 1968 opposition to the draft was growing. In Sydney, young people were burning copies of the National Service Act and registration forms. The first large-scale arrests of student protesters took place outside the Prime Minister's Lodge in Canberra in May 1968 (*Sun*, 8 May 1968; Hobart *Mercury*, 8 May 1968).

Warnings were issued in mid-1968 that student protests "like those seen overseas could take place here" (*Age*, 18 June 1968 p.1). Liberal Member of Parliament, Edward St John, claimed that protests like those at Columbia University could start at one of Melbourne's universities. He argued that it was important to protect democracy but:

> *... we can't be so happy when we see revolts taking place in parliamentary democracies. It has happened in France; it has happened in America; it can, I'm afraid, happen here* (*Age*, 18 June 1968).

In mid-1968 assaults by young people against authority symbols and "oppressive institutions" were enacted globally with a ferocity which troubled the Australian press (Boggs 1991, p.54). Australia's press reported violent clashes between rival student groups, locked in battle and occupying universities in major European cities as far apart as Rome and Oxford (*Age*, 5 June 1968). Events in Paris in May 1968 got special attention: "Riot police were besieging Paris", in the student quarter around the Sorbonne, occupied by 4000 students after a night of "bloody rioting". Tear gas grenades were lobbed at students as the Latin Quarter of Paris:

> *... echoed to the scream of police sirens, exploding bombs and shouts of students, and the district choked under a pall of tear gas* (*Age*, 12 June 1968).

In Oxford, reports came in of the "storming of buildings" by hundreds of "angry students" who beseiged the university administration (*Age*, 5 June 1968, p.1).

> *In scenes of near riot, students forced open heavy iron gates to organise a banner-waving protest sit-in ...* (*Age*, 5 June 1968).

The local press reported similarly on serious domestic anti-war violence. In July 1968, mounted police charged into a group of approximately 2000 anti-war demonstrators outside the American consulate in Melbourne. 'Troopers ride down anti-war rioters' was the headline news for the readers of press accounts in early July 1968 (*Age*, 5 July 1968). The coverage which included extensive photographs spoke of "wild mobs storming" the US consulate, "savage street battles involving razor-slashing, bottle and can-throwing students" met by mounted police troopers ordered to ride into the crowds (*Age*, 5 July 1968; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1968).

On 18 August 1968, an unsuccessful attempt was made to destroy the United States Consulate in Melbourne with petrol bombs. To the Federal President of the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL), Sir Arthur Lee, rioters "closely resembled the activities of fascist mobs". What the students were doing, according to Lee, constituted "gutter tactics of the worst type" (*Age*, 6 July 1968). Conflict between the police and students became familiar "news" to most people who read the newspapers in the 1960s and early 1970s. Headlines reading 'Student hit on the head by policeman' reinforced the image of constant antagonism between students and "the authorities" (*Age*, 1 August 1968).

Inevitably it was argued that what had begun to happen in Australia was purely imitative of and derived from overseas, especially from America (Rootes 1988, p.173). In typical vein, the *Bulletin* spoke of young Australians "like their counterparts" in the USA, France and England "parad[ing] about with placards and chanting" (*Bulletin*, 27 November 1968). Reports of student action invariably drew attention to an apparently menacing "communist influence". European reports of student unrest often appeared to "blow up" in the wake of political crises such as those marked by communist gains in national elections or by the "infiltration" of student politics by "communist parties" (*Age*, 5 June 1968).

The Australian press played up the idea that if the students were not part of a conspiracy, then they were were being "used" to help advantage the communist push to take over the "free world". Students were pre-defined as "naive" and "susceptible to manipulation". On occasion they were reminded to:

> *... take time off from purile demonstrations to study the careers of Burgess, Maclean and Philby ... They were all seduced politically at Cambridge University by extremely clever communist dialectics ... While we agree that youth should have a fling, we suggest that it might exercise more care as to what it is flinging* (*Age*, 7 May 1969).

Concern mounted in 1968–69 about the ways in which young people, particularly "the student type" were being "manipulated", sometimes by forces "even more sinister" than the International Communist conspiracy. The Minister for Education in NSW (Cutler) was reported as saying that:

> *... a new force, too radical even for communists, was behind a world wide pattern of student violence ... current disruptions of everyday life by students in Australia was a part of this world pattern and was organised outside Australia ... he had knowledge of these workers who were too radical to be acceptable to communists* (*Age*, 10 May 1969).

By the end of the sixties as the anti-war and student protest movements were becoming better organised and more adept at embarrassing the government, the press stepped up its reporting of the threat posed by the movement. In 1969 the Federal government was said to have "secret reports that militant students planned to occupy on a national level, administration buildings of universities and schools" (*Age*, 5 May 1969). These reports had been gathered by police and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), and according to the Federal Attorney-General, the reports had to be treated very seriously. A federal investigation was called for to find out who "the people were behind the organisers who were manipulating students". In Melbourne, the acting Chief Secretary explained how the state police would cooperate with the Federal police in order to control demonstrators, declaring that: "We will make sure we protect the schools" (*Age*, 5 May 1969).

As might be expected in what was rapidly becoming a full-blown moral panic about student protesters in 1968–69, "concerned" politicians were not loath to weigh in with often alarmist suggestions of "subversion". Victoria's Minister for Education (Thompson) reported that he had received reports of:

> *... underground newspapers that were being circulated at secondary schools and being handed to students at the schools gates. Student action was seen as threatening enough by Liberal MPs to warrant a judicial inquiry. An urgency motion in the House of Representatives was put followed by a heated debate* (*Age*, 15 May 1969).

In 1969 it was suggested that there be a Federal governmental inquiry into the way in which students were allegedly manipulated by communist forces.

If subversion was a constant refrain in press treatments, this was paralleled by a general attribution of disreputable and disgusting behaviour to the student protestors in ways that drew on the idea of adolescence as an inherently "irresponsible stage" in the life cycle.

Student protest movement as manifestation of irresponsible youth

When the Australian media was not promoting the Cold War model, it could always portray the student protestors using the negative metaphors associated with "adolescence as a problem period". Student dissent and the broader youth culture were defined variously as irrational, immature and idealistic, erratic, wilful and angry in an "infantile way". It was argued by some academics that the protest movement was driven by youthful idealism or by generational protest grounded in generational "Oedipal conflict" (Feuer 1970). Writers like Seymour Lipset (1969, pp.66–71) and others suggested that there was even something distinctively moral about student radicalism.

> *The student activist's sense of encouragement stems from the fact that youthful leftists appear to display a distinctive cognitive profile marked by unusually high levels of moral judgment* (Merelman 1977, p.29).

The press tended to ignore the motivational aspect of the student protest movement, becoming increasingly hostile as the level and scale of protest increased through 1968. Newspapers had often carried stories of university students and their practical jokes and student rags. A typical representation of students in the 1960s emphasised their status as "radical ratbags" who had been given everything and had then turned around only to behave like spoilt and dangerous brats. "Revolting, lewd, disgusting and indecent" is how Justice Newton of the Victorian Supreme Court described an article dealing with "matters of sex" in the student newspaper *Farrago* (*Age*, 11 March 1967).

Students at Swinburne Technical College were accused of behaving disgracefully when they were reported as "hanging brassieres over the Union Jack" (*Age*, 15 March 1967). Likewise "Monash was disgraced" by the way its students had:

> ... *dragged Australian and American flags aboard their float and hurled rolls of toilet paper over them ... which unfurled at the feet of the Lady Mayoress on the Town Hall stand* (*Age*, 15 March 1967).

Student leaders would be accused by the University of Melbourne's vice-chancellor of "acting in an unmannerly fashion" when students had asked the Governor of Victoria to donate money for medical aid to the National Liberation Front (*Age*, 5 May 1969).

More and more throughout the late 1960s the behaviour of students was unquestionably "offensive" irrespective of whether the behaviour was political or not. Often portrayed as a "long-haired scruffy-looking lot", by the mid-to-late sixties the "student protestor" had emerged as a definable icon lampooned by cartoonists and politicians alike as feckless, reckless and bad to know. Students were were invariably viewed as "unkempt and scraggy with ludicrous beards, long hair, slovenly, untidy, and even with bare and dirty feet". A placard or a banner was never too far from hand. And if dirt and subversion weren't bad enough, exuberant sexual activities and the widespread use of marijuana completed the media identikit (*Age*, 31 March 1967).

In local reports of domestic anti-war protests and demonstrations, the press were quick to identify the "irresponsible", "self-indulgent", and violent disposition of the protestors. Administrators and some senior academics were upset about the activities of "student attacks". The Acting Vice-Chancellor at Monash University condemned protestors when several hundred students reportedly broke into the university administration building and refused to leave. They were criticised for their use of "strong-arm tactics", "acts of grave irresponsibility" and their "serious dereliction of duty". Students, according to the acting vice-chancellor, "simply were not playing the game" (*Age*, 10 May 1969; see also *Age*, 7 May 1969).

In 1969, irresponsibility merged with subversion. Descriptions of the 1969 May Day march through the city of Melbourne – with an estimated 5500 participants – included accounts of "girls in jeans" and "youths" collecting money for "the enemy", – the Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. "Very pretty girls in boots, engrossed in long kisses", "long-haired and bearded students carrying yellow-starred NLF flags by the score" mixed in solidarity with the likes of Dr Jim Cairns and unionists making their way along the streets chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh" (*Age*, 5 May 1969).

Sometimes the press chose not to emphasise the carnival-like aspects of protest. The occasional large-scale demonstrations of 1968–69, some of which involved violent clashes with police, also involved increasing recourse to the metaphors of war. Reporting one "violent student clash", the press emphasised the inconvenience and impact for other people. "Important" people had their clothes "splattered" and were "jostled, abused and pelted with rotten vegetables and bottle tops" as they "waded their way through brawling crowds of youth". Punching, pulling and violent eruptions of left wing students who were protesting about "the military regiment on the campus", were typical of the images of young people presented in the daily press (*Age*, 2 May 1969). Many affected to believe that it was nothing more than a phase, a small childish period of resistance akin even to a temper tantrum that just had to be endured until they grew out of it (Boggs 1991, p.50). The press imaging of the student protestor as "subversive" was invariably combined with a more general depiction of them as people with lots of spare time doing what "student ratbags" had often done in the past.

If the Australian press drew on discourses which had an essentially mythic quality, there was little that was playful in the way postmodernists might understand. The insistence by the Australian press on the "manipulated student" working on behalf of the "enemy" was a quintessentially political interpretation designed to discredit the moral point of dissent. These representations of student protesters owed a great deal to the the Cold War culture of the late 1940s and 1950s and to the hegemonic insistence that Australian politics was about a choice between democracy, patriotism and support for the United States versus support for communism, internationalism, dissent, and subversion (Curthoys & Merritt 1984). Negative stereotypical images of young people, student activists and popular revolt were continuously constructed from afar and were rarely subjected to any serious questioning (Bear 1972, pp.155–59). Perhaps one small test of the inadequacy of these treatments of the student protest movement is suggested by the shift in press treatment of the war after 1970–75 and the success of the anti-war movement.

Cinematic representations: Fact, fantasy and pulp fiction

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Karl Quinn

Romper Stomper

Violence for violence's sake, or movie with a message?

THERE IS a touch of the fortuitous about the controversy that has surrounded Geoffrey Wright's *Romper Stomper* since it first started generating a critical response earlier this year. David Stratton has gone into print (in *Cinema Papers*) to deny what he was alleged to have said off-the-record in Cannes about the film; but Geoffrey Wright continues to bristle at the mere mention of the name of Australia's best-known critic, and apparently never fails to bring up Stratton's condemnation (which went on-the-record in his review for *Variety*, and on the Movie Show on SBS) in interviews. Others have expressed fear that the film's depiction of neo-Nazi skinhead gangs on the rampage is likely to prompt copy-cat racist attacks on ethnic minorities. The film's Australian distributors, Village Roadshow, are undoubtedly currently strung out somewhere between glee at their ability to meet the media's perpetual appetite for controversy, and an urgent impulse to satisfy the public's desire for reassurance that the film is not likely to prompt a sudden outbreak of skinhead violence.

In his *Variety* review, David Stratton said *Romper Stomper* was "*A Clockwork Orange* without the intellect". The invocation of Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film of Anthony Burgess' novel (first published in 1962) is significant, not because it is, as Stratton claims, intellectually superior to the Australian film, but because many of the criticisms currently being levelled at *Romper Stomper* were similarly made of *A Clockwork Orange* at the time of its release. According to Philip French, writing in the Spring 1990 edition of *Sight and Sound*, "Not long after the film's release, newspaper stories began to appear about gangs imitating Alex and his droogs, though the actual evidence of this is hard to come by ..." (p.86). The film has not been shown publicly in Britain since the early 1970s, and Kubrick is said to have forbidden its release there on video as a result of the reaction its cinema release may, or may not, have prompted.

It may be objected that the Burgess/Kubrick scenario was a projection of where society may be headed, and that Wright's film is a fictional depiction of a scenario which already has a real-world counterpoint both in Melbourne (where the film is set), and more spectacularly abroad; and that because of the reality factor, the film has more of an ethical obligation to show the world-view of the skinheads as morally bankrupt, to adopt an overt position of condemnation from within the film itself. Before examining whether or not the film does this, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider if or why it should even attempt to take such a position, and what are the implications of such a demand for the issues of censorship, and self-censorship by filmmakers. The expressed fear that the film is likely to inspire copycat incidents of racist violence suggests a number of things: first, that there is a marked delineation within our society between those individuals who are able to witness scenes of violence and racial hatred and impose their own moral condemnation upon them, and those who will witness such scenes and – lacking the guidance of an obvious moral position (or ignoring it if one is present) – will be persuaded that presentation equals advocacy; second, that at some level not so deep within our subconscious selves there remains the trace of racism, and perhaps even the desire to participate in ritualistic acts of racially-motivated violence; and third, that our society is extremely susceptible to persuasion by images and narrative, and can be readily convinced that a lifestyle or ideology is laudable on the basis of one film alone.

Geoffrey Wright is in no doubt that it is the first proposition that most informs the criticisms of *Romper Stomper*. "I don't go along with an hierarchical view of society, I don't believe that there are those who come out of a film like this and say, 'I feel like going out and bashing someone'. People who see this film, and I've seen it with thousands of people, are virtually unanimous in being exhausted by it – they want to have a drink, or a cigarette, not go out and bash someone. And that's because the film is deliberately structured to produce that effect. Critics who condemn the film don't feel that 'they' are likely to commit acts of racist violence; it's always someone else, some mythical person they've never met." But Wright is equally adamant that audiences should not settle for the easy option of seeing the film as a story about a curious, if frightening, group of people who in no way connect with the mass of white Australia. "The skinheads are not aliens. They are a part of this culture, and they represent something about it, in an exaggerated or an exacerbated way, that is not very pleasant to acknowledge, but nonetheless very real." Perhaps, then, we ought to understand some of the animosity towards the film as the result of its making apparent the subliminal racism which neither legislation nor politically correct thinking has yet managed to eradicate entirely.

But what of that third proposition, that images have the power to influence people so directly? The belief that images of violence provoke acts of violence is the key to understanding why people have responded to the film with such speed and apparent fear. According to the Federal Office of Film and Literature Classification, a recent study indicated that "despite the lack of conclusive evidence, 65% of Australians believe there is a connection between TV violence and violence in real life" (media release, 23 October 1992). That a similar link exists in the minds of many Australians apropos of cinema is clear. But if we were to assume, for the sake of argument, that such a link is real and not just perceived, then surely we must ask what sorts of images of violence provoke these acts? All images of violence from the apparently innocuous scenes of Sylvester the cat attempting to eat/kill Tweety-Pie the bird, through the cartoonish super-violence of *Terminator 2*, to the fictional realism of *The Killing Fields*? Are all images of violence deemed to have the same weight, or do differences in response exist in relation to differences in type of portrayal? And if so, which is better: that portrayal which depicts violence as fun, harmless and recurring (Sylvester and Tweety-Pie); as cathartic, liberating and directed solely at the forces of evil (*Terminator 2*); or as senseless, destructive and indiscriminate (*Killing Fields*)? If one were forced to decide between these options, it would be the last which suggested itself as the one most likely to have a positive effect, in so far as a realistic, nongratuitous presentation of violence and its consequences is likely to have a chilling or pacifying effect rather than an exciting one. Conversely, the violence portrayed in cartoons might then seem the most likely to provoke acts of violence, in so far as it is this type of portrayal which is most clearly linked with pleasure. If there is a link between depictions of violence and imitation, then the equation of violence with pleasure – the eroticisation of violence – must surely provide the key.

It is difficult to determine precisely how much pleasure is to be derived from the violence in *Romper Stomper*. The ending of the film is certainly cathartic, and to that extent might be seen as providing pleasure; but it is really pleasure that derives from a sense of release from the displeasure that has preceded it. For *Romper Stomper* is among the bleakest portrayals of Australian society yet to have graced our screens, its world populated by dysfunctional characters from the working and middle classes, whose only counterpoint seems to be the solidarity-in-battle of the Vietnamese gang. Undoubtedly, violence provides much of the narrative fuel for the film, but if an apology or explanation were needed for that, it could be found in the fact that the film strives for a realistic depiction of its milieu, and violence is a fundamental part of the ideology and behaviour of neo-Nazi skinhead gangs.

Hando (Russell Crowe) represents that ideology at its most well-defined. His voice, quoting passages from *Mein Kampf* to girlfriend Gabe (Jacqueline McKenzie) is a clarion call for white racial supremacy, and resistance to miscegenation. His room is decorated with press clippings of neo-Nazi activities, and his most treasured artefact is an antique WWII German bayonet, allegedly stolen from the war Museum in Canberra by a fellow skinhead. The action that drives much of the film begins when he leads an attack on a group of Vietnamese who plan to buy the pub in which the gang drinks. The attack is in fact the second of the film, the first (in a railway pedestrian underpass) having occurred within minutes of the opening credits. These two attacks actually stand in stark symbolic opposition to each other, although narratively they occur quite close together: the skinheads seem, in the first instance, to be in command, to be pro-active; in the second, it is clear that their action is in fact a rearguard stance against an inevitable tide of change. The distance traversed from that first brief and shocking scene of violence to the second, longer and more theatrical sequence, is from the possibility of the skinheads appearing heroic to the realisation that they are weak, foolish and misguided.

But *Romper Stomper* does not present the skinheads only from an ideological perspective (Russell Crowe's AFI Award-winning performance is probably the least complex of the three leads), and it would be a much less powerful film if it did. Much of the film's strength draws from the emotional veracity of the two other lead characters, Davey (Daniel Pollock) and Gabe (Jacqueline McKenzie). Together, they afford us an insight into what it is about the skinhead gang that appeals to kids who are certainly screwed up, but not as irredeemably psychopathic as Hando. That appeal can be reduced to a single word: family.

Hando is undeniably the father, as well as the leader, of this gang of eight or nine skins. The scenes of the gang together in the warehouse squat that they call home are suggestive of some backwoods father attempting to bring his children up with a strong hand, who is drawn inevitably towards the violent pattern of behaviour displayed by his own father in rearing him. Hando's devotion to Nazism might thus be understood as an attempt to rationalise, abstract and universalise patterns assimilated as a child. This character background is, however, purely speculative, as Hando's father does not figure in the plot at all. In a sense, this confers upon Hando a degree of everyman status, as we are not able to psychologise or rationalise him away; Hando just is, and his unexplained presence is a pointer to our culture's general tolerance of a barely sublimated racism. Gabe and Davey, by contrast, are supplied with sketchy but powerful emotional and family backgrounds. Davey's father is absent, an industrial diver who travels the world, sending his son souvenir matchboxes from the cities he visits, as markers of his distance. Davey lives in a twee mock-Bavarian cabin in the backyard of his grandmother's house, and ironically hides his Nazi inclinations from her, for fear that she would be horrified and fail to understand. Hando, of course, does understand Davey's isolation, his loneliness, his disaffection. More than that, he offers a way of understanding both the cause of that disaffection (the incursion of foreigners into "white" land and culture) and a solution (get rid of the foreigners). In a very clear sense, Hando is the father Davey has been lacking.

Gabe is a refugee from her own family; her mother is dead, and her father seeks to install Gabe in the dead mother's position. Gabe begins the film as Hando's girlfriend, and ends as Davey's. In between (and in one of the film's few vaguely comic moments) she briefly tries to assume the role of mother (in a displacement of her own father's desire), alongside Hando's father figure, to this ragtag group of rebels. After the remnants of the gang has escaped the onslaught of a vengeance-seeking group of Vietnamese youths by evicting some hapless hippies from a warehouse/squat, Gabe cooks a large meal of dubious desirability. Like some weird parody of Oliver Twist, the camera peers between scoffing skins and along the table to Hando, sitting with arms folded in defiance of the meal being offered to him. Sneeringly, he demands, "What's this shit?" When Gabe replies that it is "pasta with vegetable sauce; it's all we had", Hando hurls his plate across the room with the words, "Wog crap".

The scene is important in many ways. Most obviously, it reinforces the fact that Hando is the most ideologically committed of the gang (refusing to eat racially-impure food, in spite of his obvious hunger), perhaps the only one who is a skinhead[1] for what might be termed "philosophical" reasons. It also indicates his belief that there is room for only one Führer in the gang, and that Gabe's mothering represents a challenge to his leadership that must be met head-on. In this respect, the scene also functions as a short-hand critique of what Wright presumably takes to be something of a norm in traditional working-class patriarchal family structures. Finally, Hando's action is to be understood as being directed at Davey (and secondarily at the rest of the gang) almost as much as at Gabe, and signals the growing realisation that Davey is on the verge of becoming an errant son. More subtly still, it signals his realisation that his dalliance with Gabe may result in the loss of the true love of his life, Davey.

However, any suggestion of a homosexual bond between the two lead male characters is, as in so many other Australian films, strictly sub-textual. Geoffrey Wright may or may not be aware of such an attraction as a motivating force, but Hando and Davey are not, or at least are not able to articulate the fact (certain moments of eye contact between the two may, however, count as a sort of communication of such an awareness). So strongly bound by rituals of masculinity are they, that to express such an attraction – particularly obvious in the final scene of the film, in which Hando tries to talk Davey into dumping Gabe and staying with him – would be to fly in the face of those rituals and risk excommunication from the only legitimate source of male-on-male contact open to them. Gabe, in a sense, is the medium through which Hando and Davey experience each other sexually.

Wright sees the ending of the film, in which Davey chooses the option of romantic involvement with Gabe over the extended playground antics which Hando offers, as an affirmation of the old-fashioned notion that "love conquers all". "Davey and Gabe demonstrate some capacity for intimate commitment", says Wright, "and that is the beginning of the end for all big, sweeping political programs. The only way to find any happiness is to be an individual, and that's the end for those big dangerous movements. And in that sense I think love does conquer all." But the ending is even more old-fashioned than that: Davey's decision to choose Gabe leads to him slaying Hando. In the light of Hando's symbolic status as father, of Gabe's momentary position as mother, and of Davey's transition from child (skinhead) to man (romantic partner, significantly stripped of the badges that had previously adorned his jacket, and hence free from his past), the scene conveys a strong sense of the Oedipal slaying of the father in order to assume his position. The dramatic weight of the film suggests, however, more of an allegiance to the trajectory of Greek tragedy than the insights of psychoanalysis. "I think it is a kind of humble, proletarian tragedy" says Wright. "The characters don't start from any great height, but they still have these flaws which bring them further down. There is an acceptable middle-class mythology in this country; we accept bourgeois mythology but have difficulty accepting mythologies about any other class, and that includes the ruling class. In a sense, *Romper Stomper* is kind of a spit in the face of expectations of what an Australian film should be. We have a tradition of doing rural stories, or if we venture into the cities they tend to be very soft, and that's not what seems to be going on in the cities at the moment – it is very hard, it is gritty. I guess that with this film and with *Lover Boy* [Wright's short 1988 film] I was attempting to explore a working-class mythology."

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[1] Obviously not all skinheads are neo-Nazis.

That Wright's vision of life in Melbourne's working-class west as expounded in *Lover Boy* and *Romper Stomper* (his following film, *Speed*, is set there as well) is a bleak one is beyond doubt. That it is likely to provoke racial violence seems unlikely; after all, with the unemployed, bored, and aimless youth of Australia hardly even able to afford the price of a cinema ticket, the causes of gang violence and racial hatred might better be sought, and found, elsewhere. Somewhat ironically, given the film's final advocacy of romantic commitment as a means of escape from the grand hatred of neo-Nazism, *Romper Stomper* appears to lay much of the blame for the existence of skinhead gangs at the door of the dysfunctional family unit; fix that up, the film seems to say, and they will go away. But Wright's film is no more likely to contribute to the (re)constitution of the family unit as the core of society than it is to spark sudden membership increases in skinhead gangs. Disturbed as he may be (and granting that it may be a strategic disturbance) by the vehemence of those who insist on reading *Romper Stomper* as the best Nazi recruitment film since Leni Riefenstahl's footage of the Nuremberg rally, Wright remains adamant that they are wrong: "to understand what the film is on about, just be in touch with your feelings at the end of it. There is only confusion when people try to impose academic criteria onto the film; film is essentially an emotional battleground, not an intellectual one. Personally, I hope that every skinhead in the world sees it."

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John C. Murray

Heavenly Creatures

Interacting worlds of fact and fantasy

THE NUB of what I want to say is that Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* is an extraordinary film, and if you've not seen it your cinematic life will forever be that much the poorer.

Though I hear the film has only done fair business, most people at least seem to know what *Heavenly Creatures* is about. The raw facts are that in New Zealand in 1954, two Christchurch teenagers, Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme, carried out a plan: they'd devised and murdered Pauline's mother, beating her round the head with a half-brick. Honora Reiper was hit more than 40 times with blows so heavy one of them severed a finger on the hand with which she had vainly tried to protect her head. Found guilty of the crime (Pauline's diary detailing the plan came to light the very same day and, remarkably, the girls had not thought to prepare any alibi for, or explanation of, the mother's death), they were jailed in separate prisons at Her Majesty's pleasure. Parker and Hulme were released on parole five years later on the condition that they never see each other again.

Put briefly, this is the story *Heavenly Creatures* tells in an episodic structure, from the girls' first meeting at school in 1952, through their increasingly obsessive relationship over the next 20 months or so, to the day of the murder, end-titles filling us in about the trial and its aftermath.

Ah, you say, the film must be a docu-drama then, presenting corroborable data in dramatic form. Well, yes, and no. Yes, in so far as director Jackson and scriptwriter Frances Walsh have taken great care with '50s period details, and with such accuracies as the casting of Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet, each of whom bears a close resemblance to the real Parker and Hulme. Indeed, uncannily so: *The Sunday Age* of 12 February 1995 ran a reprint of a *Guardian* article about the case, illustrated with a 1954 photo of Parker and Hulme. I am sure anyone who had seen *Heavenly Creatures* would have looked twice at the photograph before deciding who was being depicted – the actual girls or the young actresses who played them on screen.

However, the film's verisimilitudes go beyond simple externals. Important though they are, the script and direction also convey the general ambiance of life in the trim, prim, closed, Anglophile world of mid-50s Christchurch. *Heavenly Creatures* evokes the disciplined, constricted nature of that world through small details: like an assembly of schoolgirls robotically obeying their headmistress's snapped command, "Sit!"; Juliet's father Henry, a

Canterbury University don, finding it impossible to say in plain words that he felt Pauline and Juliet's relationship was veering into lesbianism; and Pauline's father, Herbert Reiper (Simon O'Connor), scandalised almost beyond words when his daughter and Juliet trade mildly irreverent jokes about Sir Edmund Hillary. Christchurch in the 1950s would not have been a particularly comfortable place for any young person, let alone 15-year-olds as precocious as Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme were. (By the way, to get this Parker/Reiper business straight, when the case was being investigated the authorities found that Honora and Herbert Reiper had never formally married despite their many years together. Pauline was thus charged under her mother's maiden name, Parker.)

So *Heavenly Creatures* is in part an account of real people, places and events, the opening moments of which, we observe, come from a '50s tourist film on Christchurch. But it is much more than this, and therein lies what can be called the great courage of the film. Jackson and Walsh have sought to show us not just the nature of the material world in which the girls lived, but also the form, tone and colour of the fantastic "Fourth World" of imagination they created together.

Questions of achievement aside, consider what Jackson and Walsh have taken on. They are dealing with a notorious case of parricide. In telling the story they must keep to the facts; the specifics of Honora Reiper's murder, the girls' trial, and their subsequent incarceration are still in living memory so there can be no playing fast and loose with the data. But along with that requirement – if not an integral part of it, for actual extracts from Pauline Parker's diary provide the film's voice-over commentary – the film-makers have tried to realise, make tangible, the kingdom of Borovnia, the realm constructed by and existing in the girls' imaginations.

Things differ here from, say, Terence Malick's *Badlands* whose young delusional and murderous main characters were also based in fact. In *Badlands*, vapid 15-year-old Holly (Sissy Spacek) creates a romantic persona for herself as the Doomed Hero's Faithful Lover and acts it out. She and Kit (Martin Sheen) see themselves as role players in a melodrama and behave accordingly, their fate preordained by the conventions of genre fiction. But Pauline and Juliet aren't like this: they are not the least interested in reinventing themselves for these self-styled "heavenly creatures" exult in the genius they perceive in each other. Nor do the girls confront the public world as Kit and Holly had to in satisfying the narrative demands of the myth they were enacting. Pauline and Juliet's Fourth World is a privately shared creation in whose genesis and ongoing life they find an almost rapturous happiness. The public domain matters to them only for the movies which furnish figures like Mario Lanza, James Mason, Mel Ferrer and Orson Welles for their fantasies; or, more dangerously, when it threatens the security of their relationship.

So the castle of Borovnia, lecherous King Charles, scheming Queen Deborah, wayward Prince Diello and the retinue of palace courtiers must be vividly seen and heard on screen, as firmly *there* as Pauline's parents' boarding house and the Hulmes' semi-rural mansion. Yet *Heavenly Creatures* is not singular because Jackson and Walsh have had the daring to try to give both reality and imagination a concrete life – though that alone warrants respect – but because they succeed so well. In the event, the film's ingenious optical and computer effects, miniatures, claymodel animation, matte work, costuming and make-up all breathe a pulsing life into Borovnia and its inhabitants.

It must be said, though, that Jackson never invites us to see them as anything other than the products of artifice. This is fantasy after all, the girls' imaginative realm, and there is no point in Borovnia mirroring everyday realities. Rather, we obtain the strong sense of an actively functioning other world or shadow universe of appearances and behaviours which, though not wholly remote from our own, are not Xerox copies of them.

For example, there is a sequence when Pauline and Juliet are holidaying at the seaside with Juliet's parents, Hilda and Henry Hulme (Diana Kent and Clive Merrison). The girls have made a large, elaborately detailed sandcastle, and as we hear their voices weaving the story of Charles and Deborah's arrival at the castle after their wedding, the camera swiftly tracks in on the castle entrance, snakes inside and races up flights of steps to home in on the bridal chamber. We can see the girls' faces peering into the castle's interior through window slits, and for a few moments we have the eerie feeling that this place made of damp sand is "real", and the girls outside mere observers from a quite different planet.

The fusion of the everyday and the imaginary is realised in other ways too. Pauline and Juliet write complex stories about who is doing what to whom in Borovnia, and fashion plasticine manikins of the kingdom's people, sculpting the main characters to resemble the movie stars they adore or, in the case of Orson Welles, find seductively menacing. In the girls' fantasies these models become human-like: the Borovnians talk and sing to them, dance with them, and, on the night the girls sleep together, share their abandon.

And if Pauline and Juliet can enter Borovnia any time they wish, so too can Borovnians be summoned to cross the border. The life-size clay Prince Diello, who, like Orson Welles, is someone the girls think of as deliciously evil, acts as their agent of vengeance. At one stage, Pauline undergoes some crude psychiatric attention from a well-meaning but benighted GP, asked by the anxious Honora (Sarah Pierse) to explore the nature of her daughter's relationship with Juliet (true to the times, he later tells Honora not to be overly concerned; medicine was making great advances and a cure for homosexuality would soon be found). Irritated by the doctor's obtuse questions, scowling Pauline wills Diello to come and rid her of him. Diello materialises, grunts a scornful "Bloody fool" and despatches the man with a sword shoved slowly through his back.

So my point is that much of the energy of *Heavenly Creatures* lies in its creation of substantial, dynamically interacting worlds of fact and fantasy. But at the film's core, essential to it and binding everything else like mortar, is the near manic intensity of the girls' friendship, articulated through their collaboration in the dramas of Borovnian life.

In one episode, Juliet is standing at the front of a classroom reading aloud an essay she had written on the royal family. But it is not about the Windsors as had been requested; her story concerns Borovnian royalty. Juliet reads with a fierce energy until forced to stop by the teacher, angry the account has nothing to do with the topic the class was set. Pauline leaps to her feet, protesting that the topic had not specified the Windsors but merely referred loosely to a "royal family" and that's what Juliet was addressing. The teacher orders Pauline to sit and Juliet to return to her place. Juliet begins to do so but hesitates, moves back to the front and defiantly continues speaking, now in an excited rush, about the promiscuous Prince Diello's wanton behaviour. The class is in uproar and the teacher furiously demands Juliet get back to her desk. With a conspiratorial grin at the amused Pauline, Juliet does so. But as she sits down, a cough that had been nagging at her voice becomes more intrusive. Taking this as a further impudence (as does Pauline), the teacher yells at Juliet to be quiet. Cut to a medium close shot of Juliet's exercise book open on the desk, the sound of her hacking cough worsening. A spray of blood suddenly spatters over the white paper.

The sequence is significant at two levels. First, there is the passion with which we see Juliet reading her story, matched by the ferocity of Pauline's defence of her soul mate. These blazing enthusiasms and pressure-pack emotions suggest how very close to the limits of normal experience and expression the girls are moving. They are not seeking to be disruptive for the sake of it, or to impress classmates (they simply don't care what others think of them). It is more that Pauline and Juliet share a psychic fever, an intoxication of the spirit, which gains release in wild storms of ideas, words and actions.

The other major element in the sequence is a pivotal one: the stark evidence of Juliet's illness. Both girls had histories of serious disease. As a child Parker spent months in hospital ravaged by osteomyelitis, and the English-born Hulme was burdened with persistent tuberculosis. The blood-laced coughing in the classroom produces two outcomes for the girls, the first of them a period of forced separation when the sick, infectious Juliet is quarantined in hospital and later a sanitorium.

While the temporary separation is distressing, its effect is to render the relationship even more profound. A sequence in the sanitorium when Pauline, accompanied by Honora, is at last able to visit Juliet sharply exemplifies this. Pauline bursts through double doors and runs headlong down a corridor out into the sunroom where Juliet waits for her with arms outstretched, her drawn face radiant with delight. The girls lock into the tightest of embraces, half-laughing, half-crying with unrestrained joy, their closeness excluding everyone and everything around them. The fervour of Pauline and Juliet's devotion is palpable, and you would be less than human if you weren't affected by it.

But more fatefully, the recurrence of Juliet's illness gives the Hulmes, gravely worried about their daughter's moral as much as physical welfare, a solid excuse to plan for Juliet to leave New Zealand and Pauline, and live with an aunt in South Africa "for the good of your health, darling". The girls must now cope not just with a bitter-sweet short-term separation, but with the prospect of the desperate emptiness of a permanent one. Through private and convoluted reasoning we can only guess at, Pauline comes to the conclusion that killing Honora is the simplest way to ensure she and Juliet will be able to remain together.

In emphasising the fierceness of Pauline and Juliet's attachment I am not suggesting *Heavenly Creatures* makes the girls unknowably alien, strangers beyond our understanding or concern – though there are certainly times when the screen fills with an impenetrable hysteria. The girls go to see *The Third Man* and in the dark streets on the way home imagine they are confronted by the black-hatted, black-clad, smirking Orson Welles. Shrieking in terror the girls flee through the night, but no matter where they turn the ominous Harry is there waiting for them. Seemingly mad with panic, Pauline and Juliet finally reach the Hulme house where Pauline is staying, tumble into the safety of their bedroom and collapse on top of each other – helpless with laughter ... It's not easy to keep a grip on reason during an emotional roller-coaster ride like that.

Yet *Heavenly Creatures* signals that, aberrant though they might be, (and in the final analysis death-dealers, something the film never tries to condone – the sights and sounds of Honora's murder are terrible), the brooding, dark-haired Pauline and fair, mercurial Juliet are proper objects of our pity, not just wonder. On the day of the murder, Pauline, Juliet and Honora arrive by bus at Victoria Park in the Port Hills overlooking the city for an afternoon's outing. As per plan, wrapped in a lisle stocking in Pauline's shoulder bag is the half brick Juliet had hunted out from a rubbish heap that morning.

After refreshments in the park's tearoom, a grim Pauline and nervous Juliet suggest to Honora they follow a dirt track threading down the heavily wooded hillside. And so off they set, Pauline ahead of Honora, Juliet behind. We note the classic suspense format: a murder plan, the killers, an unsuspecting (and undeserving) victim, isolation, and an audience with prior knowledge of the plotters' intentions. And fearfully tense it is. But the most eloquent feature is the music which quietly starts behind the action as the three leave the tearoom, and emerges in its own right when voices and sounds phase out during the walk. It is the Humming Chorus from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*: lonely, wistful, deeply melancholy ...

Why *that* music, so soon to be shattered by the horror of Honora's violent death, and the blood-soaked girls' screaming flight back up the track? Because the story of Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme is, in the film's terms, cosmically sad.

These are talented, sensitive beings who give and receive love with an honesty and openness of spirit we might all envy. Far more than anyone else in the film, they are vital, actively and engagingly alive. But their commitments are too obsessive, their imaginations too extravagant and their emotions too untrammelled. As the Greek dramatists warned, Fate is unforgiving of extremes; in an ordered universe there is little room for aspirations and behaviours as strong and exclusive as these. Hence the tragic irony: Pauline and Juliet's killing of Honora Reiper, done in the strange belief that it would somehow enable their relationship to continue in South Africa (Why? How?), is ultimately responsible for the total destruction of the relationship. It is the state's decree that these two people must never, *not ever*, meet again ...

As I commented at the outset, *Heavenly Creatures* is an extraordinary film, and one could do worse than end with Richard Corliss's final judgement: "In *Heavenly Creatures* the sad creatures Pauline and Juliet must have been in real life are alchemized into figures of horror and beauty. They become the stuff of thrilling popular art."

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Susan Hopkins

Generation pulp

Pulp Fiction as a Gen-X cultural product

IN THE 1990s, understanding youth necessitates consideration of postmodern popular culture as a formative experience. It may also require in the first instance, accepting certain generalisations about a generation which grew up and out of the 1970s and '80s. For these young people, coming of age in postindustrial times has meant coming to terms with a network of cultural and economic change. While some outstanding work has been done regarding this postmodern condition (Jameson 1984, Sarup 1988, Harvey 1990) and its implications for adolescent style (McRobbie 1993), the mood, the temper, of a social group found expression in Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. Seized upon by the popular press, the name Generation X has become a media cliché. Yet as Wark (1993, p.77) has pointed out, the media appropriation of Generation X was ironic and inevitable because it features a group defined not by depression, war or social revolution but by media culture. Generation X exists, but on its own not-quite-real terms. It implies a movement through virtual reality – where experience becomes fiction – signposted by media hyperbole and associated appeals to nostalgia, glamour, violence, desire. It implies a popular cultural transformation which is impacting upon young people invariably caught up in the processes of inventing a self. It is my contention that these complex, abstract notions might be anchored by analysis of the exemplary Gen-X film, *Pulp Fiction*. *Pulp* has taken the concerns of the day and put them to work in the image-medium of the times. I contend that the film provides a timely and spectacular starting point for discussion of identity in postmodern times. It provides a means for imagining the relationship between personal and cultural fiction: for making and being made by Generation Pulp.

Pulp Fiction was awarded the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1994 and its writer/director Quentin Tarantino picked up an Academy Award for best original screenplay earlier this year. The success of *Pulp* was not uniformly well received. Its characterisation was, after all, superficial and shallow. As art, it was "ugly entertainment", an "indulgence in the playfulness of amorality" (Epstein 1994, p.12). Love it or hate it however, the film is a product of the times. Tarantino is a young director who grew up on a steady diet of popular culture television "trash". He groomed himself for Hollywood from behind the counter of a video store where he watched movies incessantly and obsessively. Tarantino's paramount film is a logical extension of his pulp media education. More importantly it speaks to a generation equally media literate on its own terms. The media becomes the message. These young people have spent countless hours absorbing the TV view of a world where irrelevant and ephemeral images combine and co-exist in a loose chaotic mix. These images may be owned – appropriated, accommodated or overturned – as a means of self-definition. Certainly in *Pulp Fiction* discourse, the self is a loose, transitory combination of media consumption choices. *Pulp's* formula vamp, Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman), introduces her personal philosophy in these terms: "Somewhere you have to make a choice. And that choice tells me who you are ... First question, Brady Bunch or The Partridge Family? ... Are you a Bewitched man or a Jeannie man?" (Tarantino 1994, pp.46-7).

Film and television (particularly films on television) are the pulp fiction of the 1990s, providing a sensational update on the cheap, popular crime magazines and novels of a pre-TV era. Tarantino (1994) opens the film with a dictionary definition of:

> **pulp**, **1**. a soft, moist, shapeless mass of matter. **2**. a magazine or book containing lurid subject matter.

Tarantino moves across outrageously lurid subject material, drawing on the stylistic devices of television to run together three simultaneous and equally meaningless stories. The stories combine as film/television pulp – as a crime genre cliché inhabited by superficial yet familiar characters. One episode features two gangsters, Vincent Vega and Jules Winnfield, and their undertakings on behalf of the local crime-lord and "godfather" figure Marsellus Wallace. This involves Vincent escorting Marsellus's wife, Mia, out for dinner. It also involves the accidental execution of an unfortunate crime collaborator. Another story features Butch Coolidge, a heroic boxer who dares to double-cross crime-lord Marsellus before leaving town with a beautiful French girlfriend. The third story, which opens and closes the film, features a Los Angeles coffee shop robbery orchestrated by a young man "Pumpkin" and a young woman "Honey Bunny" or Yolanda. These three narratives connect in a loose, haphazard manner which suggests a kind of film collage, or more appropriately, a kind of channel surfing. This may be understood as a reflection of the postmodern, postindustrial society we are now living in. Theories of this new society suggest we are living in an age of contradiction, fragmentation and instability (Sarup 1988, Harvey 1990). Moreover, this way of viewing the world is apparently applicable to the making of individuals. We can see in Tarantino's work a stark showing of postmodern personalities in the making.

Tarantino (1994, p.7) introduces Honey Bunny thus: "It is impossible to tell where the young woman is from or how old she is; everything she does contradicts something she did." In the film's epilogue we are led to believe it is possible to know the schizophrenic Honey Bunny, if only momentarily, through the popular culture she has consumed. This process is evident in the film's final scenes as the story of Vincent and Jules collides with the story of Honey Bunny and Pumpkin. In a Tarantino time-twist our two gangsters are eating breakfast in the same LA coffee shop about to be robbed by Honey Bunny and Pumpkin. Jules intercepts the robbery and soothes Honey Bunny with the common language of '70s media culture:

> *Jules:* Nobody's gonna hurt anybody. We're gonna be like three Fonzies. And what's Fonzie like?
>
> *Honey Bunny:* He's cool?
>
> *Jules:* Correctamundo. And that's what we're gonna be, we're gonna be cool. (Tarantino 1994, p.183)

Generation Pulp is defined and defines itself by entertainment discourse, in particular, the language of popular culture. What we are witnessing here is the violent play of urban life. Life is perceived as an aesthetic construction and television becomes our shared reality.

Pulp Fiction is the unsmiling face of a culture that feeds off itself. *Pulp* is a product of the contemporary postmodern imperative for superficial and streamlined reading across cultural forms. Media genres mix and merge to form a soft shapeless mass. Against this pulp setting, young people struggle to gain a sense of history and identity.

Butch Coolidge, one of the film's primary characters, grows up watching television cartoons. Before we see Butch's face on camera we see the world through his eyes: the camera takes on the perspective of a five-year-old boy sitting too close to the television, transfixed by its flickering images. Undoubtedly this is a perspective which Tarantino and his generation (wherein I include myself) can recognise and remember. We are watching the cartoon classic Speed Racer.[1] Speed is giving a detailed description of all the features on his race car, the Mac-5, "which he does at the beginning of every episode" (Tarantino 1994, p.41). In later scenes he is woken from his sleep by a television playing too loud and finds himself staring at a movie about a group of Hell's Angels called *The Losers*.

Mia, another central player of *Pulp Fiction*, was an actress in a television pilot episode about a team of female secret agents called Fox Force Five. Unfortunately for Mia, "she starred in one of the ones that became nothing" (Tarantino 1994, p.8).

Popular culture (pulp film/TV) apparently endows its inhabitants with an endless supply of ephemeral, ineffectual knowledge. The incessant soundtrack of a generation, it runs and re-runs independently of whatever is immediately happening in the "real" world, in an age increasingly dominated by images. The fictitious becomes real, life is imagined as a chaotic mix of storylines and plot twists. For young people in the 1990s, knowledge is something which is absorbed rather than recovered and it is the small things, the abstract details, which count (Coupland 1991, Wark 1993). Along these lines we might consider the prologue *Pulp* conversation between Vincent and Jules regarding what Parisians call a quarter-pounder with cheese or what they put on french fries in Holland instead of ketchup. A sign of the times is offered here: the globe is shrinking – but to what end? Ironically, in an age of supposed incredible diversity we have achieved almost uniform consumption of processed junk foods! Individual lives may be fragmented and confused but McDonalds is universal.

"McDonald's, Wendy's, Jack-in-the-Box" (Tarantino 1994, p.2); which brand to consume (what to eat, what to watch, what to wear) is the contemporary preoccupation. Generation Pulp is fascinated by style, especially when it is appropriated from previous decades. Tarantino recycles '40s film noir and through the character of Vincent, a style landmark – the greasy gangster – is revisited and remade. Tarantino plays with our expectations about gangster personalities in the scenes where Vincent takes his boss's wife, Mia, out to dinner. Vincent (played by '70s icon John Travolta) and Mia eat in a 1950s-style diner where they end up doing the twist to a Chuck Berry tune. What we have here is stylistic time-travel; a '40s film noir meets '50s and '70s celebrities with 1990s sensibilities. Once again, the pleasures we take in viewing these scenes may be connected to our postmodern setting.

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[1] Speed Racer has gained currency as a cultural marker since being "sampled" or mixed into a Hard-Core Speed techno track currently played on alternative radio and in dance clubs.

> *The practice of pastiche, the imitation of dead styles, can be seen in the "nostalgia" film. It seems we are unable to focus on our present. We have lost our ability to locate ourselves historically. As a society we have become incapable of dealing with time.* (Sarup 1988, p.133)

The pulp generation swims through this popular culture pastiche with an attitude of detached awareness. Tarantino's characters, for example, do not take life too seriously. Perhaps they, like most of us, have been somewhat desensitised by image and information overload. In any case the *Pulp* characters present us with a view of identity as a fictitious construct. Gangster hit men Vincent and Jules slip easily from discussing foot massages to committing bloody murder with the line: "Let's get into character." Both share an awareness of the not-quite-real quality of their lurid criminal activities. Living through impermanence and uncertainty requires reinventing a disposable self, a character appropriate to the task at hand. These problems of identity have been visited in psychological studies of adolescence.

> *Recently it has been recognised that the concept of a fixed identity, achieved during late adolescence or early adulthood and unchanging thereafter, is not appropriate to the constant demands for change and flexibility which assail members of a fast-paced technological society. Even "identity diffusion", the state of uncertainty over one's identity, is getting more sympathetic press* (Winefield 1992, p.41).

Certainly in the 1990s young people are entering an employment market which demands constant adaptation, flexibility and multi-skilling. This post-Fordist workplace rewards detached, managed self-awareness. Apparently, even the economy of organised crime requires it:

> *Jules:* Let's go to work.
> *Vincent:* My self is together. (Tarantino 1994, p.20)

Of course, there are qualifications to this drawing together of Tarantino cinema and the contemporary cultural climate. *Pulp Fiction* is after all unashamedly pop media. It is relentless, over-the-top and self-aware entertainment. It leaves us equally fascinated and repulsed by its sodomy and sadism, by its chaos and contradiction. Yet in itself this ambiguity speaks to a Gen-X audience: a generation which may be, of necessity, more comfortable with uncertainty in both cultural and personal narratives (Wark 1993).

Certainly many young people have fallen down the cracks and inconsistencies in the ideologies championed by their parents and teachers. Their experience generates a fascination with the accidental and the unexplained. Tarantino's preoccupations reflect and engage this cultural shift. As writer/director he prefers to focus on the connections made across narratives, imagining the impact as co-existing stories collide and diverge. In-depth character studies are not the stuff of *Pulp Fiction*. Tarantino's characters are sensational but superficial and as such they personify postmodern problems of identity and self-consciousness. I am following in the footsteps of postmodern theorists here to argue that new economic and cultural forms are impacting upon personal consciousness. *Pulp* is not just a film, it is an entire way of being. It seems we young people are not just consumers of pulp fiction, we are *living* pulp fiction. Increasingly, young people are searching for a sense of self in a culture which requires and rewards plastic personalities and the successful management of self-image. The problem is how to invent and reinvent an identity out of a chaotic mix of consumer goods, advertising appeals and media clichés. Hence, for Generation Pulp, individuality may be precarious and the self a walking contradiction.

Once again I return to the film to illustrate my point. Jules and Vincent are hired killers, they are formula tough-guy material, yet in the final scenes "they look like a couple of dorks" (Tarantino 1994, p.161). While they still walk the walk and talk the talk, the absence of appropriate gangster clothes disrupts the gangster image. Typically, Tarantino plays on our popular culture literacy – our expectation of what gangsters look like – to turn sense on its head. The film closes as "these two bad-ass dudes – wearing UC Santa Cruz and 'I'm with Stupid' T-shirts, swim-trunks, thongs and packing .45 Automatics – walk out of the coffee shop together without saying a word" (Tarantino, p.164). Stripped of their gangster props – the cheap black suits – Jules and Vincent are obviously incredulous players caught in the senseless fiction of life. Like most of us, they carry their identity self-consciously, detached from yet absorbed by the entire ridiculous spectacle.

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IT IS NOW widely accepted that the media play a central role in creating widely held images of young people. Most of these images emphasise problems like unemployment, gangs, crime, delinquency, drug use or homelessness.

Why are young people perceived as threats to social order? How representative of youth involvement in crime are media portrayals of "ethnic gangs", Aboriginal and Islander youth, disadvantaged, disabled or unemployed youth? Are the media involved in constructing or exaggerating social problems involving young people, and if so, why?

To examine these and other questions, leading Australian researchers and commentators have contributed to *Youth, Crime and the Media.* They explore the ways in which young people are represented in the press, television, film and radio. Using case studies, the book demonstrates the ways in which young people are too often represented as a threat to law and order, morality or community standards, but also illustrates that the media can be used as an expression of youth culture.

Youth, Crime and the Media
is a valuable resource for anyone concerned with the ways the media represent issues relating to young people. The book will be of particular interest to:

- youth, social and community workers, teachers, police and others working with young people;
- media personnel, researchers and policymakers in all tiers of government;
- students and academics in social science disciplines and media studies; and
- young people themselves.

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